

Strange Circumstances

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Summary: The Sequel to The Rise of the Arbiter. After the war, the UNSC discovered Forerunner technology that allowed travel to different parallel dimensions. Unfortunately, observation changes the target environment. With an insane Monitor and a mad scientist on the loose, Kerry and his team must enlist the help of the heroes of various worlds to save reality. Please Review.

1. Cure

This is a first-hand account of the events leading up to the Dimension War. Much of this is based on heresay and rumor, as I was not present for some of it. We have lost so many, it almost kills me to attempt to recount it. Hopefully, if we survive this war, this biography will show the people of Earth all that was sacrificed. If not, then...well, there won't be a people to show. This is not a journal. These are my remembrances.

* * *

><p>The Cure<p>

The celebration on the Spirit of Victory was in full swing. The threat of the Covenant was gone; the rings in the Halo Array were all accounted for; the Flood from Installation 05 destroyed. This was the time for fun.

>After a few hours, Colonel Kerry Freeman stumbled to his bed. As he lay down, he reflected on the past seven years. Mutation, the attack on his brother, his transformation into Arbiter and back, the outbreaks on Alpha and Delta Halo, the glassing of Africa by Rtas 'Vadum, and the Ark.
He had gained and lost many people over the years. Kevin fell to bad luck, Tyrel to the Flood. Even his friend on NOBLE, Jack-B312, who went by the callsign NOBLE 6, was lost when Reach fell. What hit him most was Ethan. That bastard Guilty Spark had corrupted him. While the Chief fought the heinous orb, Kerry had been forced to kill his best friend. Said orb had also killed the

only non-ALPHA soldier who hadn't judged him on reputation, only action, Sergeant Major Avery Jr. Johnson.

>He had gained many allies as well. Natalie and Joey on this ship, the Chief and Cortana, Tyler, ALPHA Team, the NOBLE Team survivor Jun, and Thel 'Vadam, the Arbiter after him. They had fought many battles, though Kerry spent most of the battle of Delta Halo behind enemy lines.
He remembered the First Battle of Mars, where he got his team. He remembered the assault on the Pious Inquisitor. He remembered the coup on his prowler, when he nearly killed Natalie, only to have his rational side overload his inhibitor. He remembered the fight for SWORD Base and the Assault on Reach, in which almost an entire team of SPARTANs had died, leaving Jun-A266 to take the mantle of NOBLE 1. He remembered the fight against the Flood across two Halos, Earth, and the Ark. The fight against the Monitor, 343 Guilty Spark, and his unwilling pawnâ€|

>He flexed his prosthetic arm. The wound was a result of the fight with Ethan. When they got back to earth, the admiralty had promised him compensation for the limb, though how he didn't know.
As he nodded off to sleep, the dream came. A recollection of bad memories. Tonight was the worstâ€|

Kerry, John, Johnson, and Ethan followed Guilty Spark into the Control room of Installation-04(B). Johnson was talking to the "Lightbulb". Kerry, Ethan, and John hung back, watching for exits for when the ring imploded. They heard the Monitor yell, "ABSOLUTELY UNACCEPTABLE!"

>They turned and saw Spark blast Johnson, who screamed. He dropped to the ground. Guilty Spark turned to them, his eye glowing red. "You will not destroy my Installation!"

>He turned to Ethan, and issued a command in a language Kerry did not know, but somehow understood, "Kill the Meddler."

>Ethan turned and rugby-tackled Kerry off the platform. The man was strong. They rolled down the curved chasm and hit bottom. Kerry jumped up and activated his sword. Ethan did the same.

>Ethan lunged with a powerful swing. Kerry got his sword up just in time and blocked the slash. They broke apart and circled. Kerry dashed forward and angled right. As Ethan raised his guard, Kerry feinted and juke left. The resultant hit penetrated the armor, but only shallowly. The force of the blow knocked Ethan spinning. Ever the clever one, he used this momentum for a spinning slash.

>Kerry saw it coming too late. He tried to dodge, but his left arm didn't make it with him. As the wound cauterized, he stood and let out a rage-powered fury combo. Ethan blocked most of the strikes, but a few got through. Left arm, right arm, left foot. Soon he was left with only his right leg. As he fell on his back, Kerry held the sword to his throat. Kerry asked, "Why?"

>Ethan laughed, "Humanity has committed atrocities over the ages. As the Flood retains the knowledge of its hosts, to reduce its warmongering, we must destroy the source. Humanity must die for the universe to live. The Forerunners knew this."

>Kerry snapped back, "The Forerunners did what they did for humanity to live! How can you think like that!?"

>Ethan coughed up blood, and then responded, "Guilty Spark opened my eyes to the truth. After you destroyed his installation, he deemed you a threat to their culture. He is the arm of the Makers, and I am their instrument."

>Kerry closed his eyes and muttered, "I recall saying that

onceâ€|"

>Ethan opened and closed his mouth, at a loss for words. Kerry tensed his body and raised his sword. Ethan realized the implications of the motion.

>"Wait, sto-!"

>VVVMMMM

>Ethan's head rolled across the floor. It stopped facing up.

Kerry walked over to the body and took his dog tags. He went to the head and removed the helmet. He mounted the helmet on his hip and put on the dog tags. He combed the Spirit of Victory.

>"Ethan is downâ€|killed by 343 Guilty Spark. I'm in need of evacâ€|"

>After this, he collapsed from shock at the loss of his arm.

The next thing he knew he was waking up in the med suite of the Spirit of Victory, with Natalie and Adam looking at him. He realized that in order to pick him up, they would have seen the body of Ethan.

>"Iâ€|canâ€|explain."
They looked at each other. Natalie spoke up softly, "We know. We pulled your video logs. The official statement was Guilty Spark killed him after Johnson. You lost your arm after his sword flew out of his hand from the blast."

>He felt helpless. "Forgiveâ€|meâ€|"
She looked at him, "We don't blame you. It was that bastard Spark. Now get some rest."

>She leaned over and gave him a soft hug. She turned and walked away, leaving him and Adam in the suite.
Kerry immediately tried to get up. Pain shot through his back where his spine had been mended 6 years ago, and he gasped. Adam pushed him back into the bed.

>"Man, ya gotta stay in bed. The prosthetic will be ready in an hour, the therapy done an hour after that. Then you can join the party. The admiralty told us to tell you that they will more than compensate you for the arm."
He remembered the two who were with him on the Ark.

>"What aboutâ€|John and Thel?"
Adam shifted nervously. "Uh, well, we know Thel survived."

>Kerry sighed, then asked, "And John?"
"MIA. The only SPARTAN truly MIA. The Ark's Slip-space portal closed on the middle of the Forward Unto Dawn. Thel got to earth, but John and Cortanaâ€|"

>Kerry laid his head down. He nodded off, stress and the shock of his friend being missing getting to him.<p>

Kerry stood on ceremony at ONI Command in Sydney. He and his men were being awarded the Medal of Honor, even Natalie and Joey. Hell, Thel got one too, though his had the symbol of the Separatists, the Mark of Shame, as opposed to the UNSC crest. Kerry took Ethan's to keep his memory alive. Johnson's went to Jilan al-Cygni, his only romantic interest. Jun took John's. As they saluted to Fleet Admiral Lord Terrence Hood, Kerry was wondering what they would do with him.

>Even as he thought it, Hood spoke to them.
"I know I promised Kerry compensation, but I feelâ€|"

>Kerry groaned.
"â€|that any who want it will be able to have it too."

>Adam spoke up, "Sir, what do you mean?"
Hood straightened, "We found a way to reverse the mutation."

>Kerry gasped, "What!?"
Hood laughed, "If you want it, of course."

>A feeling nagged at the back of his mind. He voiced it, "If we want,

after we turn back, if we want to, could you turn us back? I just want a month as a human, so I can turn on my own terms."
Hood nodded, "Yes, I understand. We can do that. Unfortunately for some of you, your genetics force you to only re-mutate into your current species."

>Joey looked dejected. Adam patted him on the shoulder. Before all this, Joey had been the largest of all of them. Now he was miniscule. Even if he turned human, he would still be smaller than most of the others.
After a small debate, it was decided that Kerry, Joey, and Chris would be demutated. They followed Lord Hood into a large chamber with a giant capsule in the middle.

>"Alright, who's first?"
Kerry stepped forward, "I'll go."

>"Alright, step forward," Hood stated.
One of the techs walked up to Kerry, "Alright, Colonel, this is a simple procedure. When you step into the capsule, we will release a harmless gas. This is to protect your dignity. Then we will bombard your body with a reversed version of the radiation that initially transformed you. When you shift, there will be excruciating pain. In all tests, the subject kept the relative muscle mass they had in their mutated form. So don't worry about fragility."

>Kerry walked into the capsule. The door cycled closed. The tech popped in over the intercom, "Sir, we will need you to remove your prosthetic. The radiation might fuse it to your skin, and we don't want that."
He took off the arm and set it in a nook where he also saw a robe. As he stepped into the center of the capsule, gas began to fill the room. Once it filled to the roof, the tech stated, "Alright, Colonel, remove your armor and under harness."

>He did so, and set them in the nook. He again stepped into the center. "Sir, starting radiation treatmentâ€|now!"
He felt his body heat up exponentially. Pain racked through his body. It felt as though his entire body was being rearranged. He held for as long as he could, but it became too much.

>He let out a roar of pain, which slowly shifted into a human scream. As the last vertebrae popped into place, the pain stopped. As he tried to stand up, he lost his balance. His feet were too small to stand on his toes like the Sangheili did. He forced himself to stand with his feet flat.
"Colonel, there are clothes in the nook where you stored your armor. Please put them on."

>He went to the nook and grabbed the robe. It fit perfectly. Only as he put it on did he realize that his arm had grown back. He flexed experimentally. It worked.
He walked out of the capsule. He was met by cheers from the rest of ALPHA. A different tech ran up. "Sir, we need you in the armory. As you are still active duty, we need to get you a suit of MJOLNIR so you can keep up with the rest. Afterwards, we have a new assignment for you."

>Kerry could care less. He was human again.<p>

2. The Rift (Meeting The Blue Blur)

The Rift (Meeting the Blue Blur)

For some reason, the mission had to be in space. Kerry had had enough of space. The coldness, the dark, the inhospitability. But the tech said they had to be there. The mission itself was to test a rift gate into alternate dimensions

As he and his team stepped forward, the tech explained, "The rift will take you to the exact same position in the alternate reality. We

have adjusted our orbit to sync with a space station in the other reality. We have corresponded with the caretaker, who just wished to be named Shadow. He says that the station is deserted, but watch for the automatic defense system. It creates some sort of artificial chaos," he consulted his notes, "artificial chaos", whatever that means." Trevor cocked his head, "How can chaos be artificial? Chaos is chaos, you can't fake it." Kerry shook his head, "Doesn't matter. We go." They stepped in front of the Rift Gate. A tech signaled them that it was active. The gate started to spin. From four pylons in the inner circle, electricity began to arc. The gate ramped up the speed and a portal opened in the steeled himself, and ran through.

A feeling like a liquid permeating his entire body took over. He couldn't breathe for a second. After a bit, it was over.

>He found himself in a dark hallway. Black ooze was everywhere.

Trevor and Adam came up behind him.
 "What happened?"

>Their comms crackled. A voice that sounded like it had seen the worst the world had to offer and didn't care what anybody thought of it said, "Welcome, Otherworlders. I am Shadow."
 Kerry clicked the respond key in his MJOLNIR helmet. "You're our contact?"

>"Yes. The ooze you see is the remnants of the Black Arms, who fought to take this station. I will guide you to the pod that you will use to come to the surface."
 Kerry clicked the Agree button.

>"Alright, go forward. There should be a door at the end of the hallway. Go through it and you should be at the station tram center. It will take you to the hanger."
 The team did as they asked. As soon as the doors opened, however, a voice came over the intercom.

>"Unauthorized life-forms detected. One human, two unknown entities. Enforcing Station Security Protocol 02: Activate Artificial Chaos."
 Shadow cursed in their ears, "Oh, shit. RUN!"

>The three bolted for the tram. As they activated it, from hidden nooks came strange hybrids of water and machine. They opened fire.
 Kerry and Trevor had problems. The Artificial Chaos were liquid, so Kerry's shots went straight through, and they were too fast for Trevor. But Adam's Particle Beam Rifle boiled them.

>Shadow yelled over the comm, "Fire at the brain! The machine!"
 Following his orders, they managed to get to the hangar bay. They bolted for the shuttle, which had a stylized symbol of a hedgehog on it. As they got in and put it on autopilot, they heard many voices over their headsets.

>"Ah, shit!"
 "Eggman's here. REGROUP!"

>"Dang it!"
 An exasperated Shadow came back on, "Sorry, we're being overrun. The ship's too far gone for a course correction. You'll have to fight your way out."

>Kerry cursed, "Dang it! This mission just went FUBAR!"
 He turned to his teammates, "Prepare for landing. Exit is hot, repeat, exit is hot!"

>The ship glowed red. They braced against the walls.
 This was one of those times Kerry loved power armor. As they descended, a massive AA shot hit them, disintegrating the ship. The three of them managed a controlled dive into a moving mass of red. As they hit, tons of metal went flying.

>Kerry got up and assessed the situation. The enemies in question were smaller than Grunts, about knee-high. At the head was one slightly taller robot, dark blue with red eyes. His torso appeared to be a jet engine and he looked a little like the symbol they saw on the ship.
 The robot in question turned to them, and said in a

monotonous voice, "Who are you?"

>Kerry responded as he usually did in these situations. "We could ask the same."
The robot laughed, "I am Metal Sonic 2.0, the greatest creation of the genius Dr. Ivo 'Eggman' Robotnik. And you areâ€|?"

>Kerry indicated his team, "This is Trevor, our heavy weapons. Adam, our sniper. And I am Kerry, the leader. We are ALPHA Team."
"Are you here to join the esteemed Eggman?"

>Kerry smirked, knowing full well the robot couldn't see it behind the helmet. Or could heâ€|? Didn't matter. "Is he in league with a being known as Shadow?"
Metal Sonic spasmed and yelled, "FAKER!" before straightening and stating, "Thatâ€|experiment is no longer with us. He joined forces with the hated Sonic."

>Kerry chuckled, "Then that's who we're with, too."
He undid his rocket launcher, and took aim. It was an older model, and it took him a second to get accustomed to the reticule. He locked onto Metal Sonic, and fired.

>The knee high robots scattered as the rocket flew through their ranks. These things were worse than Grunts. It hit Metal Sonic, knocking him flying. As one, ALPHA activated Sprint and dashed through the ranks. After they had gotten a good distance from the battle, the comm crackled.
"Good to see you made it out."

>Kerry growled, "Shadow, what were those?"
Shadow made a hmph noise, "Those, my uneducated friend, were Egg Pawns. They are the foot soldiers of Dr. Eggman."

>Adam popped in, "Where are you?"
"About a day's walk north of here, you will find a city by the coast. We are grouped in the house shaped like a kitsune."

>The radio cut out.
Adam cocked his head, "Kitsune?"

>"Multi-tailed fox," Kerry answered quickly, "Come on, let's move."<p>

After a day, they reached said house. As they reached for the door, which was small, a robotic female voice announced, "Enter."

>They did, Trevor having to crawl due to his size. As they stood in the center of the room, a dark silhouette walked out of a room.
Kerry called to it, "Who are you? Shadow?"

>The shape chuckled, "Ha-ha, no. I'm not Shadow."
It stepped into the light.

>"Name's Sonic. Sonic the Hedgehog."<p>

3. Meeting Sonic Team

Chapter 3

>Meeting Sonic Team<p>

ALPHA stared, incredulous, at the creature in front of them. It was large (for a hedgehog), it walked on two legs, it had hands, and it wore shoes. He had five large quills on the back of his head, and two on his upper back. But what struck them most was his fur color. He was blue. Very blue.

>Kerry shook his head in shock, "Sonicâ€|the Hedgehog?"
Said animal gave him a thumbs-up and a wink, "That's me!"

>Kerry thought back to the fight with the Egg Pawns. "Any relation to a Metal Sonic?"
Sonic looked solemn, "Yeah, the good doctor built him as an ultimate weapon to defeat me. Didn't quite work, though. Me an' him think exactly alike. Leads to a stalemate."

>He brightened up, "C'mon, meet the gang."
He motioned them into

the room he was just in, which turned out to be a workshop. Multiple animals were in here.

>Sonic motioned to an orange kitsune with two tails. "This is my brother, Miles 'Tails' Prower. He's the genius behind our operation."
Said kitsune ran up to Kerry and ran a scanner over him. "Amazing," he said, looking at the readings, "This armor is way advanced."

>Kerry gently pushed him away, "Kid, please stay off the MJOLNIR."
Sonic gestured at what looked like Sonic, but with dreadlocked quills and red fur. He had spikes on his glove-like hands. "This is Knuckles the Echidna, Guardian of the Master Emerald, last of the Echidnas, some more stuff like thatâ€|"

>Knuckles shot an angry look at Sonic, and then stretched his hand out. Kerry took it, and it seemed as though he was testing the strength of his handshake. He obliged, putting just enough strength to make Knuckles yelp in pain.
"OW!" he yelled, rubbing his reddened hand, "Niceâ€|gripâ€|"

>Sonic and Tails laughed, and Sonic pointed a white hedgehog with wavy, star shaped quills, and a purple cat in a regal dress. "These are Silver the Hedgehog and Blaze the Cat. Silver's a Psychokinetic and Blaze is Pyrokinetic."
Silver gave a calm salute, while Blaze did nothing.

>Sonic whispered to Kerry, "She's antisocial."
As Blaze looked pointedly at Sonic, he coughed uncomfortably. He went on, "We have a few others that aren't here now. We will introduce you to them later. In the meantime, why don't you find a room and get some rest. Upstairs is the guest rooms."

>Kerry and Adam looked at Trevor. Kerry turned to Sonic and stated, "Unless the upper floor has titanium-reinforced flooring, my armor ain't going up there, and Trevor ain't going period."
Sonic looked at Trevor, who was on his stomach. "Why? He isn't that bigâ€|"

>Kerry snapped his fingers, and Trevor stood up. He was huge, twice the size of Kerry, who was in turn twice the size of Sonic. The hedgehog gaped up at the Hunter.
"Dang! You're big!"

>Knuckles butted in, "Kerry and Adam will be able to stay here, 'cause they look like us. But this dudeâ€| Why don't I take him to Angel Island?"
Sonic looked at him in shock. "Wait! What? You're willingly bringing someone to Angel Island? Why?"

>"Well, it's the most secluded place we know, and he would make a good defense weapon."
Sonic rolled his eyes. "You and your Emerald."

After this, Kerry was out of his armor and sparring with Knuckles. The echidna was extremely good with MMA, and Kerry was struggling to modify his Sangheili CQC for his human form and Knuckles' small stature. Even so, they were at a stalemate.

>Behind him, he heard a motorcycle pull into the garage. After a few minutes, a rush from a minijet was heard. As Kerry turned, Knuckles jumped up and got him in a headlock. He used his momentum to slam him into the ground.
"Never take your eyes off the opponent. Ever."

>Kerry grunted, "Wouldn't be so tough if I had my armor, would you?"
Knuckles laughed. Over the roar of his guffaws, Sonic yelled out for Kerry.

>Kerry disentangled himself from the echidna and walked to the garage. Inside, Sonic was standing with a black hedgehog and a larger robot with the Greek Omega on his shoulders.
Sonic waved him forward. "Kerry, this is Shadow the Hedgehog."

>The black hedgehog turned and Kerry got a better look at him. He

looked reasonably like Sonic, but he had black fur. His quills stuck up in the back, and he had red highlights on his arms and quills. He wore gloves, same as Sonic, but he also wore rings on his ankles and wrists. His shoes were a more advanced version of Sonic's. He carried a large rifle on his back. He crossed his arms and made a "Hmph" noise.
Sonic went on, "And this is E-123, designation Omega."

>The bot, who was about abdomen height, looked Kerry up and down. "Analyzing: Threat Level Maximum. Unknown Technology detected. Activating defensive measures."
Sonic quickly stepped in front of Omega. "Whoa, buddy. He's on our side. Put him in your allies program."

>Omega froze for a second, then stated, "Program rewritten: Subject: Kerry Freeman now Authorized Friendly."
Kerry looked warily at Sonic. He shrugged.

>They were interrupted by Tails yelling from the workshop. They ran in.
"What is it, little buddy?"

>Tails was jumping up and down in excitement. "I did it!"
Sonic cocked his head. "Did what?"

>Tails started talking fast. "Remember that Echidna robot we found a while back? The one that went haywire? The Gizoid?"
Sonic nodded, "Yeah. Emerl. How could I forget him?"

>Tails went on, "Well, I managed to extract the AI from his body. While doing that, I found the schematics for his body. With the help of the tech from the Dark Brotherhood, I managed to reconstruct him to almost original specifications!"
Sonic had started nodding off. Kerry picked up the slack. "Meaning?"

>Tails snapped his fingers. Out of a side door walked an orange robot. He had bright blue eyes, and a horn on his head. He was about Sonic's height. When the bot saw Sonic, he jumped on him. Kerry grabbed his Assault Rifle from his back. Tails held him back.
"Wait."

>Kerry nodded. He now noticed that the robot wasn't attacking Sonic, he was playing with him.
"Ow, ow! Emerl, stop! I missed ya too, man!"

>The robot stood up and apologized. He turned to Kerry and asked, "Who's he?"
Sonic picked himself up. "That's Kerry. He's new."

>Emerl turned to Tails, "Can I fight him?"
"I'm not sure if that's--"

>Kerry butted in, "C'mon, Miles. What's the worst that can happen?"
Tails sighed, "Fine, but two conditions. First, wear your power armor."

>"And second?"
Tails glared at him, "Don't call me Miles."

Fifteen minutes later, they were out in the yard. Kerry had his power armor, and full use of his weapons. Emerl just stood there, slightly cocky.

>"Fight!"
Emerl charged, with speed that would rival Sonic. Kerry dodged out of the way and pulled his sword. He activated his av-cam.

>As Emerl looked for him, he snuck up behind. He let out a massive slash. The attack knocked the robot reeling. As Kerry stood triumphantly, the robot stood up. To Kerry's astonishment, Emerl flickered and disappeared. When he looked closely, he saw a shimmer. Then impact.
"CRAP!"

>He hit the ground. The robot alighted near him and deactivated the av-cam. He leapt into the air. Kerry rolled and fired his rocket launcher. As the rocket closed on him, Emerl raised his arm and

brushed the rocket away. Kerry held the launcher up in self-defense. A purple, forked blade erupted from Emerl's arm and neatly bisected the launcher.
As he hit the ground, he rolled up and Spin Charged. After a few seconds, he bounced backwards and a wave of energy launched forward. Kerry sidestepped and activated an overshield. He pulled out his shotgun. One, two, three shots into the bot. As the smoke cleared, he saw Emerl standing, unscathed, with a silvery ripple around his body. Kerry decided to pull out the big guns.>He ran to the edge of the arena and grabbed his Spartan Laser. He turned and activated his Drop Shield. As it rejuvenated him, he took aim. The Gizoid was firing shot after shot outside, using some sort of shotgun replica. As the shield ran down, the charge cycle completed.
He looked through the scope. "Sayonara, sucker.">He fired. The laser shot forward at the speed of light. An aura of red surrounded the Gizoid. When it dissipated, he saw a redlining Drop Shield with Emerl inside.
He sighed to himself, "You've got to be joking.">He pulled out two MA-37 assault rifles and opened fire. The robot ran sideways out of the way. He heard the thing yell, "Chaos Control!"
He felt an impact on his back. He reached behind and grabbed it. It was a small capsule with blue energy swirling inside. Etched on the side were the words Sonic Cracker. He realized what this meant too late.>When the shock subsided, he struggled to get up. Blood was staining the inside of his helmet, obscuring his vision. A side of his visor was cracked. As he got up, he removed the helmet. He nodded at Emerl.
"Come get some!">Emerl started forward, but was blocked by Sonic. Shadow appeared in front of Kerry. Shadow whispered to him, "You did great, Kerry. But you can't win this."
Kerry looked furious, but relented. He felt his adrenaline wearing off. The pain in his limbs was becoming too much to bear. He passed out.

4. Chaos Power

Chapter 4

>Chaos Power<p>

As Kerry came to, the first thing he noticed was a bright gem. He struggled to get up. Firm hands pushed him down, and a feminine voice stated, "Stay down, Kerry. You're hurt.">His eyes focused and he saw a pink hedgehog standing over him. She smiled as she changed his IV.
"You took quite a beating. Why did you challenge Emerl?">Kerry coughed, "I didn't. He challenged me."
The hedgehog turned to someone he couldn't see and scowled. He heard Emerl mumble something like "Sorry, mom". The hedgehog turned back to him and smiled again.>"Sorry about him. He doesn't know his own strength."
Kerry laughed. He knew what that was like. One thing was bugging him, though. "How did he do that? He was using moves I had used. Stuff no one here should know.">She laughed sadly, "Well, Emerl is a Gizoid, a remnant of the Technocratic Echidnas, the Dark Brotherhood. He was programmed with the ability to copy techniques he sees in combat, so as to make the ultimate warrior. He copied your moves, weapons, and even some of your style and personality."
"And the energy wave? The bomb? Chaos?">He copied the first two from Sonic. Chaos Control was from

Shadow."
He nodded to the gem, "And this?"
>He heard a door open and shut. Shadow's voice was heard, "Thank you, Amy. I'll take it from here."
The hedgehog (Amy?) nodded and left. Shadow and Omega walked into his field of view.
>Shadow started, "To answer your question, that is a Chaos Emerald. Mine, in fact. We are using it to speed your healing. You took one hell of a beating."
Kerry noticed something was odd about Omega. He was staring in the direction of the door and his hands had turned into guns.
>"Uh, what's with him?"
Omega answered, "Eggman robot detected. Chaos energy in vicinity of target. Must complete Primary Objective."

>Shadow closed his eyes and disappeared from thin air. A second later, he reappeared. "It's just Emerl."
Omega insisted, "Eggman technology present in target: designation 'Emerl'. Advise lethal action to avoid unnecessary casualties."
>Shadow snapped at the robot, "Omega! Override targeting of Emerl. Access code: Maria."
The robot stiffened, then announced, "Target lock lost. Gizoid Model 1, designation 'Emerl' added to friendly database."
>Kerry turned his attention to Shadow. "Why are you here?"
He nodded to the red emerald, "The Chaos Emerald is causing a bleed-off effect. It's pumping more energy than is needed to heal you."

>Kerry looked at him in fear.
Shadow smirked, "It won't kill you. Many of us have massive amounts of Chaos energy in us. I myself am 25% Chaos energy. The level you're approaching is more like 50%."

>"Meaning?"
"You now can control the power of Chaos, god of destruction. I am here to teach you how to do this."
>The emerald made a pinging noise. Shadow grabbed it, and studied it. "As I thoughtâ€¦!"
Kerry sat up. "What is it?"
>"You completely drained the emerald. It's useless unless I can get it to Knuckles."
He gave it to Omega, who stored it in his chassis and turned to walk out the door.
>Kerry nodded at him, "Where's he going?"
Shadow simply stated, "Angel Island."
>He pulled off Kerry's covers. "Time for training."
Kerry jumped out of bed and followed the black hedgehog. He took them to the same field he fought Emerl at. Said Gizoid was waiting for them, alongside Metal Sonic. Kerry stopped.
>"What's HE doing here?!"
Metal Sonic raised a hand, "Hold. I am not Neo Metal Sonic."
>As Kerry looked, he saw definite differences. Whereas 2.0 looked a lot like Sonic, with the many spikes and larger stature, this thing was smaller and only had three spines. He also didn't have the funny elf shoes and the waist-cape of 2.0.
"Are you 1.0? And who is Neo Metal Sonic?"
>Shadow answered this question, "This is the original. Eggman created him to defeat Sonic. After Sonic him, he went back to save him. He had Tails copy his AI into an identical body, and left the copy. The copied data had errors, making NMS think that he was Sonic. He orchestrated an entire journey that ended with us all fighting him. He was built with Gizoid data, and could copy us. After his defeat, Eggman reprogrammed him. We did something similar to Metal Sonic by changing his Priority One from 'Destroy' to 'Protect'. Now, he helps us in our fight."
Metal nodded.
>Emerl walked forward, and stated "We gave him similar programming to me so he could keep up with NMS, and we're here to learn new techniques. By the way, those weapons you used were

awesome!"
Shadow crossed his arms, "Enough! We start. Metal, you're with Kerry."

>The two walked toward each other. Shadow stated the rules, "Alright, you are allowed to use any means necessary to beat your opponent. Kerry, tap your chest."
He did so. As he watched, his armor formed up around him. He felt on his back and noticed mini versions of his weapons.

>"We altered your armor to be portable. We used some old Egg tech to shrink your weapons until they come in contact with your hands."
Shadow stepped back, and chopped the air.

>"Fight!"
Metal and Kerry circled each other, each waiting for the other to move. Finally, Metal charged at him. Kerry sidestepped and elbowed the back of Metal's head, knocking him sprawling. The robot picked himself up and Drill Punched Kerry. Kerry guarded and caught Metal with a downwards hook to the head, followed by a double elbow to the face, knocking the robot flying.

>The robot scowled at him. Kerry cocked his head playfully.
"That all ya got?"

>Energy started to cluster in Metal's chest. Kerry waited until it formed into a beam, and dropped a Bubble Shield. When it failed, he charged Metal, pulling his sword.
He slashed at him, but Metal spin stepped and punched him in the back. Kerry back slashed, but got empty air and an injured arm as a result. He found Metal, and stabbed. Metal sidestepped, grabbed his arm, and twisted it behind his back, forcing the sword from his hand.

>Kerry tilted his head forward, then slammed back as hard as he could, stunning Metal. He punched Metal in the chest, and as he flew back, grabbed his leg. He pulled Metal toward him and let go. Metal's momentum pushed him toward Kerry's moving fist. The punch connected, sending Metal skidding across the ground.
Kerry high-jumped and brought his fist down right in the middle of Metal's chassis. He pulled out his shotgun and held it golf club style. He stepped on Metal's chest.

>As he brought the shotgun back, out of the corner of his eye he saw Shadow's eyes widen. Metal seemed to realize what he was doing, and his eyes increased in intensity and size.
"No, no, no, NO!"

>THWACK!
The gun connected straight in between the legs of Metal. The impact sent the robot flying into the wall. Kerry flipped his gun up on his shoulder and walked over to Metal. The machine lay in a rut, sparking. Shadow and Emerl ran up to them.

>Emerl was stunned. "Wow. And I thought I was a brutal fighter!"
"Emerl," Shadow started, "Take Metal to Tails for repair."

>Emerl nodded, picked up Metal, and ran off to the workshop. Shadow turned to Kerry and nodded.
"Chapter 4

>Chaos Power<p>

As Kerry came to, the first thing he noticed was a bright gem. He struggled to get up. Firm hands pushed him down, and a feminine voice stated, "Stay down, Kerry. You're hurt."

>His eyes focused and he saw a pink hedgehog standing over him. She smiled as she changed his IV.
"You took quite a beating. Why did you challenge Emerl?"

>Kerry coughed, "I didn't. He challenged me."
The hedgehog turned to someone he couldn't see and scowled. He heard Emerl mumble something like "Sorry, mom". The hedgehog turned back to him and smiled again.

>"Sorry about him. He doesn't know his own strength."
Kerry

laughed. He knew what that was like. One thing was bugging him, though. "How did he do that? He was using moves I had used. Stuff no one here should know."

>She laughed sadly, "Well, Emerl is a Gizoid, a remnant of the Technocratic Echidnas, the Dark Brotherhood. He was programmed with the ability to copy techniques he sees in combat, so as to make the ultimate warrior. He copied your moves, weapons, and even some of your style and personality."
"And the energy wave? The bomb? Chaosâ€|Control?"

>"He copied the first two from Sonic. Chaos Control was from Shadow."
He nodded to the gem, "And this?"

>He heard a door open and shut. Shadow's voice was heard, "Thank you, Amy. I'll take it from here."
The hedgehog (Amy?) nodded and left. Shadow and Omega walked into his field of view.

>Shadow started, "To answer your question, that is a Chaos Emerald. Mine, in fact. We are using it to speed your healing. You took one hell of a beating."
Kerry noticed something was odd about Omega. He was staring in the direction of the door and his hands had turned into guns.

>"Uh, what's with him?"
Omega answered, "Eggman robot detected. Chaos energy in vicinity of target. Must complete Primary Objective."

>Shadow closed his eyes and disappeared from thin air. A second later, he reappeared. "It's just Emerl."
Omega insisted, "Eggman technology present in target: designation 'Emerl'. Advise lethal action to avoid unnecessary casualties."

>Shadow snapped at the robot, "Omega! Override targeting of Emerl. Access code: Maria."
The robot stiffened, then announced, "Target lock lost. Gizoid Model 1, designation 'Emerl' added to friendly database."

>Kerry turned his attention to Shadow. "Why are you here?"
He nodded to the red emerald, "The Chaos Emerald is causing a bleed-off effect. It's pumping more energy than is needed to heal you."

>Kerry looked at him in fear.
Shadow smirked, "It won't kill you. Many of us have massive amounts of Chaos energy in us. I myself am 25% Chaos energy. The level you're approaching is more like 50%."

>"Meaning?"
"You now can control the power of Chaos, god of destruction. I am here to teach you how to do this."

>The emerald made a pinging noise. Shadow grabbed it, and studied it. "As I thoughtâ€|"
Kerry sat up. "What is it?"

>"You completely drained the emerald. It's useless unless I can get it to Knuckles."
He gave it to Omega, who stored it in his chassis and turned to walk out the door.

>Kerry nodded at him, "Where's he going?"
Shadow simply stated, "Angel Island."

>He pulled off Kerry's covers. "Time for training."
Kerry jumped out of bed and followed the black hedgehog. He took them to the same field he fought Emerl at. Said Gizoid was waiting for them, alongside Metal Sonic. Kerry stopped.

>"What's HE doing here?!"
Metal Sonic raised a hand, "Hold. I am not Neo Metal Sonic."

>As Kerry looked, he saw definite differences. Whereas 2.0 looked a lot like Sonic, with the many spikes and larger stature, this thing was smaller and only had three spines. He also didn't have the funny elf shoes and the waist-cape of 2.0.
"Are you 1.0? And who is Neo Metal Sonic?"

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>Emerl was stunned. "Wow. And I thought I was a brutal fighter!"
"Emerl," Shadow started, "Take Metal to Tails for repair."

>Emerl nodded, picked up Metal, and ran off to the workshop. Shadow turned to Kerry and nodded.
"How did the energy feel?"

>Kerry shook his head. "I didn't feel anything. I don't think it worked."
Shadow smirked, "Au contraire, my friend. After Metal beat you down with the sword, your body emitted negative Chaos

energy. You noticed how your attacks became more cruel and sadistic after that?"

>Kerry nodded, "Yeahâ€¦"
Shadow crossed his arms. "That was Dark Chaos affecting you. It pumped up your strength, and decreased your morality. In time, I can teach you to focus this into a concentrated wave known as Chaos Blast. There is also a light version of Chaos, known as Hero Chaos. With it, you can use a power known as Chaos Control."

>Kerry thought this over. The boons this power gave him would be necessary if a new evil arose in his universe. He took a knee.
"I would be honored if you would be my teacher, Shadow the Hedgehog." "did the energy feel?"

>Kerry shook his head. "I didn't feel anything. I don't think it worked."
Shadow sided how your attacks became more cruel and sadistic after that?"

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"I would be honored if you would be my teacher, Shadow the Hedgehog."

5. A Friend in Need (A Brother Has Turned)

Chapter 5

>A Friend in Need (A Brother has Turned)<p>

"Try to envision your target in your mind"

>Kerry concentrated. In his mind, he saw the practice dummy. He imagined himself above it. As he concentrated, he heard Shadow's voice slow to a low droning noise. When he looked up, everything was stopped. He jumped at the dummy, unholstered his gun, and dropped the time-stop.
He opened fire. The bullets destroyed it. He heard Shadow clapping slowly, alongside a faster clap. He turned.

>Next to Shadow was Adam. He yelled, "Nice! Didn't even see ya move!"
Shadow nodded. "And thatâ€¦is Chaos Control. It isn't teleportation, as that idiot echidna thinks, but an actual slowing of time around you. If two people used Chaos Control at the exact same time, they would see each other in real time. However, you CAN teleport using it. But it taxes your energy if you don't have an Emerald to power you. That's why I have the Red Emerald."

>Kerry bowed, and asked, "Will I get an emerald, master?"
Shadow crossed his arms, "I'll talk to Sonic."

>Suddenly, Shadow stiffened and put his finger to his ear.
"Shadow here. What is it? What for? Fifth? But we only have-. Fine, we're on our way."

>Kerry walked up to him, concerned. "What was that?"
All Shadow said was, "Suit up; we're going to Space Colony ARK."

And so events transpired to put Kerry back in space. All Shadow would tell him was that his universe was sending another man "For defensive purposes". Kerry had heard that before, when the UNSC insisted on putting personnel on the Covenant homeworlds. It meant they didn't trust them.

>Kerry walked to the portal area. The vortex was active, and a dark

shape was coming through. The proximity to the portal caused his helmet to link to the other universe, and it started to auto-update. The helmet designated this shape as Joseph Wagers, a SPARTAN-II and another good friend.
He waved at the man, but Joseph took one look, paused, and pulled out a shotgun. He opened fire.

Joseph was nervous. All this alternate universe shit set him on edge. The techs cleared him for portal use, so he headed through. On the other side, his helmet EMP'd momentarily.

>As it rebooted, a figure was standing in front of him. He was dressed in MJOLNIR armor, but he was surrounded by a major radiation field. His FOF jammed, and a message scrolled across his helmet.
/SUBJECT: UNKNOWN

>LARGE AMOUNTS OF UNKNOWN RADIATION IN VICINITY OF TARGET

>RECOMMEND: TERMINATE

>He listened to his HUD. He pulled out his full-auto shotgun and opened fire on the entity. Faster than he could see, the thing jumped from wall to wall, narrowly avoiding his shells. All of a sudden, it disappeared. He felt a tap on his shoulder.
"Behind youâ€|"

>He turned, and saw the butt of an MA-37 fly toward his face. Everything went black.<p>

When he woke up, he saw the entity sitting nearby. It had its helmet off, and it was chewing on a toothpick. It noticed him, and turned to him. It smirked.

>"So, you're awake. Long time, no see, Joseph."
He recognized the voice. He clutched his head.

>"K-Kerry? How-why-what are you doing here? I was supposed to meet that guy Shadow."
Kerry crossed his arms, "Shadow isn't a guy. Well, he is male, but not human. To answer your question, he sent me because he thought you would react better to a SPARTAN."

>Joseph laughed, "Well, that didn't work so well. You and your team get through all right?"
Kerry nodded.

>"And Tyler?"
Kerry cocked his head. He had no knowledge of his brother ever being in the universe. "He was here?"

>Joseph nodded, "After you didn't come back, they sent him in for retrieval. Guess he didn't make it."
"Quite the contrary, my friends."

>They both turned. Behind them, they saw the aforementioned Brute Major. He had his Shot out and aimed at them. Kerry put up his hands.
"Whoa, bro. What did we do?"

>Tyler frowned, "You joined the hated hedgehog and his band of miscreants who wish to topple the glorious and illustrious Dr. Eggman, and his dreams of the Eggman Empire."
Joseph cocked his head in confusion, but Kerry pulled out his MA-37.

>"Well, dÃ©jÃ vu. This is getting old."
As Tyler fired, Kerry flickered. In that instant, the Shot exploded, its grenade being redirected back into the barrel. As Tyler screamed, Kerry grabbed Joseph and ran, heading for the shuttle bay. The Artificial Chaos again attacked them, but they ignored the water beings. They dove into the shuttle, and Kerry slapped the autopilot. They entered the atmosphere. Alarms began to sound.

>Kerry yelled back to Joseph, "Hull breach! Engage your armor seals!"
Atmosphere started to vent from the hull. Several bulkheads crumpled in. Fire started to vent into the shuttle.

>All of a sudden, the fire stopped. They had safely entered the atmosphere. Kerry took manual control and headed toward Tails' Workshop.<p>

When they landed, Kerry and Joseph walked into the house. Kerry turned to Joseph and whispered, "Don't freak out. They are natural for this world."

>Joseph cocked his head quizzically, the gesture comical with his scarred EVA helmet. Kerry opened the door to the workshop.
Joseph's reaction was amusing, in a sadistic, scary way. When he saw the animals, he thought they were Grunts. He pulled his shotgun, grabbed Sonic, and put the barrel to his head.

>Kerry used Chaos energy to separate them. Sonic put his hands up in defense. "Whoa, Sergeant Fishdome, don't go psycho!"
Kerry saw something pink run at Joseph, wielding a giant hammer. He yelled, "Joseph, Armor Lock, now!"

>The large SPARTAN took a knee and slammed his fist into the ground. Amy swung the Piko-Piko Hammer at the Locked body, and it knocked Joseph onto his side. Sonic ran up to her and tried to calm her down, while Kerry helped Joseph up.
Shadow walked in and looked at the scene, Metal and Emerl behind him. He crossed his arms and cocked his head.

>"What happened?"
Kerry took a look around him. Not much damage. He responded, "Uh, well, Joseph tried to kill Sonic because he thought he was a Grunt. He really hates Grunts."

>Shadow made an amused huff. Sonic had succeeded in calming down Amy, and now walked over to Kerry. He pulled out a bright blue Emerald.
"Shadow talked to me about your aptitude at Chaos Control. I felt, as you show no signs of leaving, that I would give you this."

>Kerry took the emerald. It seemed to grow to fit his hand. A feeling of emotion washed over him, seemingly emanating from the emerald.
Sonic continued, "Knuckles spoke with the Master Emerald. It sensed your inner power, and decided the blue emerald, the emerald of Hope, would suit you."

>Shadow added, "If you give your armor to Tails, he can refit your powerpack to house the emerald. Then you would be able to recharge indefinitely, and use Chaos powers at will."
Kerry nodded.

Later, Kerry and Metal decided to have a rematch. They squared off. Joseph watched in amusement. A tiny robot vs. the pinnacle of human evolution. This could end amusingly.

>Kerry started off with a vicious right hook. Metal got his arm up and blocked the strike. He unleashed a kick to Kerry's face, which Kerry grabbed. Kerry started to spin around at dizzying speeds.
He let go of Metal's leg, sending him flying. He used Chaos Warp and appeared right above Metal. Kerry flipped, unleashing a brutal spike kick to his head.

>As Metal rocketed toward the ground, Kerry teleported again, appearing below him. Kerry reached up and grabbed Metal by the face and slammed him into the ground.
Joseph smirked and turned to Shadow. "What does that robot think he's doing?"

>Shadow simply nodded at the battle, "Watch."
Kerry brought down his fist into the chassis of Metal. Right as the punch was about to connect, Metal yelled "Chaos Control!" and teleported away. Kerry turned and activated the jets on his armor, sending him rocketing toward Metal. Metal did likewise. Two sonic booms erupted from the battle. Metal and Kerry connected.

>The shockwave knocked the spectators to the ground, all except for Joseph, Adam, Trevor, and Omega.
When the dust cleared, a red glow was visible. Kerry was standing over Metal, who looked much the worse for wear. He was surrounded by a red aura.

>Shadow saw him, and yelled to the spectators, "GET DOWN!
NOW!"
The aura around Kerry seemed to recede into him for a

second. He crossed his arms in front of his face, as if holding in the energy, and yelled, "CHAOS!"
>He floated into the air, and his aura shined brighter. He shoved his hands forcibly to his sides.
"BLAST!"
>The aura coalesced into a solid sphere of destruction. It rippled out from his body for a distance of about thirty feet. Everything in the sphere disintegrated. Most of Metal's casing ripped off, revealing his innards.
The wave petered out. Kerry dropped to the ground, dazed. He struggled to stay on his feet. Shadow skated out to him and tried to help him with his balance. He looked up at the skull engraved EVA helmet and sighed.
>"Well, that's Chaos Blast!"<p>

6. The First Battle (Behold, Mecha-Tyler)

Chapter 6

>The First Battle (Behold, Mecha Tyler)<p>

Kerry yawned. Today was off to a boring start. Sonic had taken them out on a recon trip to Eggman's base, and he and Joseph had been lying prone all morning. He wished for some action.

>An Egg Pawn walked into his sights. He heard Sonic in his helmet, saying, "Take him out. I'm going in."
Kerry lined up the sniper rifle on the Pawn's head, and squeezed the trigger. The bullet flew across the distance and hit it in the head. The Egg Pawn's cranial case exploded.

>He saw a blue streak fly by the destroyed robot. He heard Sonic say, "Alright, come on."
Kerry slung the rifle onto his back, and motioned for Joseph to activate active camouflage. He did the same.

>They ran for the base, smoothly passing every Egg Pawn around. They met up with Sonic inside the base. He motioned at the many robot production machines around them and said, "Might as well."
Kerry and Joseph set out putting charges on the machines, while Sonic set about freeing the animals.

>As they finished, Kerry pulled out the detonator. He flicked it open and pressed the button.
Nothing happened. Kerry clicked it a few more times. Still nothing. Abruptly, all the screens in the room flickered to life, and the visage of a bald man with a giant mustache and goggles appeared.

>"Ho-hohoho!"
It was Eggman. Sonic ran up to the screen and shook his fist at him. Eggman laughed at the gesture.

>"You didn't think I'd leave my factory unprotected, did you? Your charges won't work here!"
Kerry yelled at the screen, "Why don't you come face us yourself, Egghead!"

>Eggman laughed, "I would, but I'm taking a little vacation. I hear Delta Halo is very nice this time of year."
Sonic scratched his head. "Delta Halo?"

>He turned to Kerry, who was glowing red again. Kerry looked up at the screen. "Get the HELL out of my universe!"
Eggman laughed again, "I don't see your name on it! And besides, these 'Forerunner' artifacts are too delicious to pass up. Don't worry, I left someone to play with you."

>They heard a door open behind them. Mist rolled out of the room. A dark figure walked out.
"Behold!" Mecha Tyler!"

>The figure walked into the light. It looked like a Brute, if a Brute were made entirely of metal. In place of his hands were a Brute Shot and Gravity Hammer. He focused on Kerry.
Kerry growled, "I don't have time for this!"

>He turned to Joseph, "You want to play in the big leagues? Take him out!"
Joseph cracked his knuckles and walked forward. The Robian focused on him. Joseph pulled his sword and ran at him.
>What transpired next can only be described as a pathetic attempt by Mecha Tyler to get accustomed to his new body. As he guarded against Joseph's lunge, Joseph stabbed his knife into the elbow joint of the Brute Shot hand, destroying the connection to the weapon.
He grabbed the Shot and twisted it behind Tyler's back. He grunted with exertion.
>"You know what's great about you being all robot?"
Tyler uttered his first sound the entire fight, "What?"
>Joseph chuckled, "I can break you."
With that, he pulled with all his might on the Brute Shot. The weapon, and the arm, came flying off. In a fluid motion, Joseph tore the arm off the Shot, got it into the human ready position, and fired at Tyler's back. The concussion scrambled Tyler's CPU, and he fell, blacked out.
>Joseph tore open the arm he detached and grabbed the rounds stored there. He stood triumphantly, his trophy on his back. Kerry nodded in approval.
"You're in."

Later, Kerry and Joseph stood in the Space Colony ARK. Alongside them were Shadow, Emerl, Metal, and Sonic. Shadow commed the other universe.

>"UNSC Defense Platform Cairo Station! Requesting immediate opening of Rift. We have intel that our universe's Dr. Eggman has jumped realities, and are requesting permission to fight."
He paused for a second. "Yeah, that's him. Brookings? All right, we're ready."

>Kerry gave him a quizzical look. Shadow responded, "He is hiding out in your home town."
Kerry clenched his fist in anger. He started glowing red. Joseph put a hand on his shoulder, "Save it for the enemy, man."

>Kerry got control of his emotions. They had a bad egg to trash.<p>

7. Home Field Advantage

Chapter 7

>Home Field Advantage<p>

Kerry saw the blow coming, but it was too fast to stop. It connected and knocked him through the building. As he got up, he thought about how FUBAR this mission had gotten.

>Once they had arrived in Brookings, they immediately found Eggman. He seemed to be baiting them. With him had been NMS, a Shadow Android, and a Mecha Tyler, who apparently had a centralized CPU which allowed multiples of him to fight at once. Eggman had ordered them to attack, and NMS had moved faster than his eye could follow and landed a vicious punch to the chest. That was how he ended up in the wall.
He tracked onto NMS and gave chase. He saw Metal also pursuing him. Kerry ramped up his speed and tackled NMS. The grab slammed the android into the ground, creating a crater. As Kerry reared back for a final blow, NMS thrust his hands out flat. A solid wave of air lifted Kerry off his feet, and threw him through yet another building.

Julie yawned. The day's shift had dragged on forever. She was glad it was over. As she headed to leave, she heard an earth rattling shake, and a large, armored body flew through the wall. It hit the ground

and skidded across the floor.

>It stopped and got to its feet, shaking its head.
"Dangâ€¦!"
>As she turned to see what had thrown this large metal man through the wall, she saw a strange sight. What looked like two robotic porcupines were fighting it out over the building.<p>

Metal saw NMS knock Kerry through the building named "Fred Meyers". Text scrolled before his eyes as his combat processor came up with a solution.

>ALLY: KERRY FREEMAN INCAPACITATED

>NEW DATA: NEO METAL SONIC HAS ABSORBED SILVER THE HEDGEHOG'S PSYCHOKINESIS

>NEW DATA: BUILDING "FRED MEYERS" HAS MASSIVE HOLE LEADING TOWARD ALLY: KERRY FREEMAN

>PROCESSINGâ€¦|

>SOLUTION: KEEP NEO METAL SONIC AWAY FROM ALLY: KERRY FREEMAN AT ALL COSTS

>With his new directive in place, he charged toward NMS. He overdrove his jets and slammed into NMS, sending him flying.
His victory was short lived. The newer chassis teleported behind him and unleashed a vicious Psi-Wave, knocking the older flying. Before Metal could orient himself, NMS turned back toward the hole. Energy charged up, but he wasn't aimed at Kerry.

>He wanted to damage the girl!
Metal let out a scream.

>"NO!"<p>

Julie saw one of the robots shove the other away. It then turned to her. She saw its chest start to glow. She heard a metallic scream of anguish. The laser fired.

>She felt a massive weight slam into her, and a feeling of the world turning upside-down. After a few seconds, the weight released, and she was sent flying. She found herself outside the store, with a new hole in the wall. As she got up, she saw the metal man struggle to stand up. His head had a jagged crack down the middle. He reached up and disengaged locks on his neck.
Only as the halves of the helmet fell away did she realize this was a SPARTAN. He turned to her, and her heart skipped a beat.

>Here was a man she thought she would never see again. Kerry Freeman looked at her. As she examined his face more, a realization came to light.
He was mad. Not you-pissed-me-off mad, but full on I'm-gonna-kill-you mad. His body emanated a dark, angry red aura. He turned and walked to NMS. He tensed his body and somehow rose into the air. He crossed his arms.

>"Chaosâ€¦|!"
A sudden fear seized Julie. She knew that if she stayed much longer, she would be killed. She turned and ran.

>Too late.
"â€¦|INFERNO!"

>She felt a wave of power hit her, and then nothing. When she opened her eyes, she could see down into the town from a mountain. In the area of Fred Meyers, she saw a gigantic sphere of red energy. She knew nothing inside could survive.
She looked around and saw a black and red hedgehog standing next to her, arms crossed. Julie asked him, "What happened?"

>The hedgehog nodded in the direction of the explosion. "That was Chaos Inferno. When uncontrollable rage overcomes a person as adept with Chaos Energy as Kerry, this is what results. The dark power of Chaos took him over, and he had to release it, or die."
Julie took this new information in slowly. The implications of Kerry's obvious new abilities scared her. She couldn't even comprehend it anymore. One last thing niggled at her mind.

>"How did I survive?"
The hedgehog made a hmph noise and stated, "I saved you."
>Julie cocked her head, "How?"
The hedgehog uncrossed his arms and turned to her. "I can manipulate Time energy using a technique known as Chaos Control. I used it to stop time and get you out of the way."

>He held out his hand, "My name is Shadow the Hedgehog."
Julie hesitated, then reluctantly shook his hand. "I'm Julie."
>Shadow cocked his head. "I'll be right back."
In a flash of blue light, the hedgehog disappeared. A second later, he reappeared, carrying both Kerry and a bright blue gem. Somehow the little animal was supporting Kerry, who's armor had shredded clean off, and whose body suit was all that was left. Shadow laid him down on a soft patch of grass. He leaned down and listened for a heartbeat.
>Kerry coughed abruptly, a fountain of blood spurting from his lips. Shadow laid the gem on his chest and put a finger to his ear.
"Shadow calling Sonic. Yeah, I saw it too. It was Kerry. It took a lot out of him, and we need a medevac now! Alrightâ€|just hurry."
>He turned to Julie, "Don't worry. Medevac is coming for your friend."
He tried to smile reassuringly, but only succeeded in a smirk. But Julie understood the attempt.

Kerry dreamed. In his dream, he saw the Ark. In one of the many canyons, he saw twin bases. His mind zoomed in on the one near the water. As he went inside, he saw Dr. Eggman tinkering with a metal ball the size of a beach ball.
>"Almostâ€|Got it!"
The eye in the center of the orb, which Kerry recognized as the monitor 343 Guilty Spark, flared blue. He started to say his customary greeting, but appeared to malfunction. His eye flickered all across the spectrum, before settling on a peaceful orange. It spoke, his voice immediately familiar.

>"Uhâ€|Whereâ€|amâ€|I? Who are you?"
Eggman chuckled, "I am the glorious Dr. Eggman. I fixed you, and released your mind into this machine. Who are you? What do you remember?"
>The Monitor's eye flared red. "There's someone I have to take care of. As for who I am, that name no longer applies to me. But for convenience, you may call me Ethan."
Kerry woke up abruptly. Seated next to him were Julie and Shadow. Julie held him down while Shadow asked, "What is it!?"
>Kerry grabbed his forehead, "Aâ€|dream, orâ€|aâ€|premonitionâ€|."
He shot straight up. "Call Lord Hood! I know where Eggman is!"

8. A Reunion on the Ark

****Chapter 8**
>Reunion on the Ark

****Fleet Admiral Lord Terrence Hood** paced the briefing room, trying to digest what he was hearing.
>"So, what your telling me is this Dr. Robotnik-"
Sonic cut in, "Everyone calls him 'Eggman' now."
>"-this 'Dr. Eggman' is on one of our most guarded installations, which is blockaded by both UNSC Frigates and Carriers, and Covenant Carriers and Super Carriers? He somehow got past all that?"
Kerry nodded, "And that's not the worst. Somehow he has managed to bring Guilty Spark back online, and access what appeared to be a last

minute personality upload from Ethan's neural lace to Guilty Spark before he died."

>Lord Hood turned to Kerry, "Meaning?"
"Meaning, sir, that instead of a monitor that listens to humans and only cares about his ring, we have a psychopathic SPARTAN-trained mind inside of a powerful Forerunner artifact. One who is hell-bent on killing all humankind so the Flood can't warmonger again.

>Hood rubbed his temples, "Good God, what have we done?"
He straightened, "Alright, Colonel, I want you and your team to get there. We need to secure Guilty Spark at all costs."

>He left the room, leaving Kerry to pick teams.
"Alright, I think we should bring only those who have experience with fighting on a space station. All those who are confident in their abilities, step forward."

>Shadow stepped forward. After a second's hesitation, Sonic and Joseph stepped forward. Metal was uncomfortable in his abilities in an environment where his jet would be useless, and Julie had been sent to training so she might help the team better later, so this was the best he would get.
Kerry clapped his hands together, and stated, "Good. I think it might be a good idea to bring Emerl as well, don't you think, Sonic?"

>Sonic nodded his assent.
Kerry nodded, "Alright, team, let's go!"**

**A day later, the Spirit of Victory was over the green petal of the Ark. Kerry pointed toward one of the canyons.

>"There! That's where he was!"
Joseph accessed the ship's database. "That'sâ€|Installation 17. Valhalla. It's in charge of regulating the shield generator for the Ark."

>Natalie called from the pilot's compartment, "That's too far for me to go! You'll need to take a Pelican!"
Kerry pinged affirmative and headed for the hangar bay. He and his team piled into the vehicle in question, with Shadow taking pilot.

>Kerry came up and tapped him on the shoulder.
"Hey, ya know how to fly her?"

>Shadow shook his head and stated, "No, but I'm a quick study."

**Kerry staggered out of the wreckage of the Pelican. He was supporting Shadow and Emerl. As he set them down and pulled out his Emerald, he muttered, "Quick study, my assâ€|"

>He waved the emerald over Shadow's wounds, healing them one by one. Shadow sat up and coughed.
"What was that, Colonel Asshole?"

>Kerry adopted a bearing that could only be described as innocent, which came over rather amusingly in full MJOLNIR.
Shadow got up shakily. Joseph came out of what they were now arbitrarily calling Red Base.

>"Got a faint drive signature that matches Eggie's Egg Pod!"
Kerry nodded in approval, "Where does it lead?"

>Joseph pointed up. Kerry followed his finger.
A massive, red battleship hung in the air. Sonic and Shadow gasped.

>"Oh, my God!"
"The Egg Carrier?!"

>A shockwave knocked them to their backs. They saw the Spirit of Victory kick back, a blue streak firing from the front of it. The MAC shot hit the Egg Carrier, and ricocheted into the canyon.
The slug hit Blue Base, disintegrating it. A swarm of Sentinels flooded out of the crater, heading for the carrier.

>Natalie's voice came over the comm, "We need some support here! All human ship Commanders and Covenant Shipmasters respond! This is a

Priority 1 directive! All ships, please respond!"
Her voice faded to static, to be replaced by one annoyingly familiar voice. Their HUD's video screen cut in, showing the face of Dr. Eggman.

>"Ho-ho-hoho! Allow me to introduce you to my latest creation! The Egg Super Carrier! Powered by a unique source!"
A voice yelled in the background, "Hey, go screw yourself! I'm actually alive here!"

>Eggman coughed, "Erm, yes, well allow me to introduce"241

Ethan!"
The orb in question floated into the screen. "OW! Shit, can't control this danged thing."

>He got his bearings. "Ah, yes! I see your little ALPHA down there, Kerry! You will all pay for your treachery. Come here and face me mano-y-mano!"
Kerry activated his comm. "More like SPARTAN to Sphere!"

>The monitor's orange eye flared red. "Such big talk for a little man!"
"Who're you calling little, Beachball?"

>"Why you!"
Eggman tried in vain to calm Ethan down, but it was too late. His eye glowed bright red.

>"YOU WILL FEAR MY LASER FACE!"
The screen washed red, then cut to black. As the view cleared, Kerry saw a red laser cut out the side of the Egg Super Carrier.

>Kerry shrugged, and turned to his team. "Alright, jetpacks!"

**They entered in through a destroyed camera station. As they explored the room, they noticed one thing conspicuous.

>All that was in the room was an Eggman head on the floor. As Sonic saw it, he took a few steps back.
"Uh guys!"

>The floor started to rumble. Panels around the head retracted, and a massive mecha rose out of the floor. It looked like a stylized Eggman, but much larger.
Kerry took a reflexive step back. "What the Hell is that?!"

>Sonic shook his head and backed away. "The Death Egg Robot but a different one!"
Kerry also noticed something odd. As opposed to the usual red sheen of most Eggman creations, it was silver. Carved Forerunner script covered the robot, and in the center shone a giant orange eye.

>Kerry grasped what was happening too late. "Watch it! It's-!"
The mech raised its hand, took aim, and fired the entire hand at Kerry. Kerry rolled, warped, and brought both fists down on the back of the Egg Carrier Robot's head. It seemed to hurt Kerry more than the robot.

>As the momentum knocked Kerry back, he saw three different colored blurs fly toward the robot. Sonic, Shadow, and Emerald went on a Homing Frenzy, bouncing all around the bot. He saw the Black Blur phase out of existence at some points.
He watched them carefully, then activated Chaos Control. He fired a massive volley of Chaos Spears at the robot, positioning them so they wouldn't interfere with the supersonic movements of the Blurs. Next to him, he saw Joseph, who he had brought into the timestop with him, doing the same with the grenades from his Brute Shot. After a nod from his friend, Kerry dropped the timestop.

>Multiple explosions ripped across the Egg Carrier Robot's body. Its head blew clean off, and a monitor flew out of it.
The eye of the monitor turned red. "You think you have won! I was merely a distraction! Good luck seeing the crew of your Spirit of Victory ever again!"

>Ethan gathered the parts of the Egg Carrier Robot together and shifted them, reshaping the metal into a smaller, humanoid shape. He

inserted himself into a slot in the stomach, turned, and jumped out the hole in the wall. As Joseph went to the window and looked out, he saw the minimech grab onto a giant lizard-like mecha piloted by Eggman. Shadow stepped up beside him and inclined his head at the mech.
"Hmph. The Egg Dragoon. The only thing Eggman built correctly, minus that indestructible Egg Pod of his."
>A portal opened up in front of the Dragoon, a green reality portal instead of a black Slipspace portal. With a screech of anguish, Kerry ran and dove out of the Carrier, and fell straight toward the Dragoon. Joseph reached out for him, but missed. Kerry grabbed onto the pilot's pod of the Dragoon right as it went through the portal. The reality portal closed behind it, leaving Kerry stranded on whatever reality they left to.
Shadow and Sonic stared incredulously at the space previously occupied by the Dragoon.

>"Well, this sucks."

9. Unity, Duty, Destiny

Chapter 9

>Unity, Duty, Destiny<p>

"We got him!"

>The yell from the tech startled Metal out of standby. He ran a quick internal diagnostic and got up. He walked over to the tech, a one Mr. Dick Simmons.
"Are you sure you have found him?" Metal asked in a monotonous voice.

>Simmons nodded his head vigorously, "Yessir! We cycled through multiple channels on the Rift, and got a ping from Colonel Freeman's armor!"
Metal nodded. "Store the channel in the memory banks and shift to Mobius. We need to assemble a team. Once I leave, I want recon on local species, to better choose a good team."

>Simmons nodded, "Yessir!" He went on to adjust the portal channel.
The portal turned from the green of an unknown reality to the soft blue of Mobius. Metal stepped forward to enter, but stopped and looked at the tech.

>"Simmons?"
The tech's head shot up faster than Sonic's spin dash. "Yeah?"

>"Good work."
Simmons stiffened in excitement. "Thank you, sir! And might I say your armor is a fine shade of blue today!"

>Metal walked through the portal. "Kiss assë"<p>

After the usual gauntlet to get past the Artificial Chaos, who, for some reason, refused to acknowledge him as a friendly, he left the ARK and was heading to the surface. When he got to Tails' Workshop, he saw the entire team assembled, awaiting his news.

>"We have picked up his armor signature."
A collective sigh of relief issued from the group. Metal went on.

>"We must assemble a team designed to handle any environment. We have no idea about anything in this world."
Shadow nodded. "I'm going. I don't breathe."

>Omega stepped forward. "I will accompany you. Eggman must pay."
Emerl also approached, "I might be of some help, as well."

>Joseph walked up. "I want in."
Surprisingly, Adam walked forward as well. "I can't just sit on the sidelines while my CO is missing."

>Metal indicated himself, "I will also go. You need speed this time, and I can fly as well."
They all nodded. Joseph clapped his hands.

"Alright! Let's get back to Cairo Station!"

One by one, the new team walked through the portal. Simmons was still there, hunched over his work. Metal spoke up.

>"Simmons!"
The tech in question jumped in surprise. "Yessir?"

>"Did you acquire the intel I requested?"
Simmons nodded. "Yessir! The native species appear to be a mix of predominantly robotic beings with organic parts and predominantly organic beings with robotic parts. No full organics as far as we can see."

>Metal nodded, "Thank you, Simmons. Open the portal."
"Yessir!"

>The portal opened, looking like a black hole with red lightning flashing through it. The team stepped inside it.
They came out in a desert. As they looked around, they noticed a city built into a volcano. Joseph gestured toward it.

>"Let's go."<p>

After a day's march, the party reached the gates of the city. A pair of guards about the size of Metal stopped them.

>"Who approaches the city of New Mangai?"
Joseph stepped forward. "It is I. SPARTAN Joseph, with his team, seeking a word with your leader!"

>The guard scoffed. "If you wish to speak with the leader, you must first win a Glatorian match! Each!"
Joseph looked at his team. They nodded. He turned back to the guard.

>"We will do it!"
The guard turned to his counterpart. "Kapura, take them to the ready room."

>The other guard nodded, and started to walk, very slowly, in the direction of a side door.
"Follow me."

After a few minutes, they reached a ready room. Inside, a blue being, a bit larger than Kapura, was training. When they approached, he stopped and looked at them.

>"Hello. My name is Berix. I assume one of you is my opponent?"
He suddenly zeroed in on Joseph's Brute Shot.

>"Ooohh. Can I just-?"
A large blue hand came and slapped the smaller one away. Joseph looked up and saw a blue armored female, about the same size as he was.

>She scolded Berix, "What did I tell you, Berix? Sometime you're going to anger the wrong person, and I won't be there to save you."
She turned to the group. "Sorry 'bout that. Name's Kiina. You must be the travelers."

>Joseph nodded.
Kiina went on, "Have you ever been in a Glatorian match?"

>Omega spoke up, "Negative."
Kiina rubbed her temples. "Okayâ€|who wants to fight Berix?"

>Metal straightened, "I will engage in combat with Berix."
Kiina looked beseechingly at Joseph. "You really want this little guy to fight one of our top warriors?"

>Joseph nodded again. Kiina shrugged.
"Suit yourselfâ€|"

A while later, Metal stood facing Berix in an obsidian coliseum. The announcer took the podium.

>"We have a splendid match tonight, folks! Representing New Mangai, we have New Mangai's defending Agori fighter, Berix!"
Berix lifted his shield in the air, and the crowd screamed.

>"Challenging Berix, a newcomer from distant lands, the Madness, the Overlord, Metal Sonic!"
Metal's processor informed him now would be a good time to showboat. He jumped into the air, spinning his

torso one way and his head the other. The crowd oohed at him.

>"Yes, look at that fine example of dexterity. But this isn't a beauty pageant! Fight!"
Berix took the offensive, charging at Metal. Metal's combat processor analyzed Berix, marking the shield as the weakness. Berix pulled up short as Metal curled into a ball and spun himself up. Metal released the Spin Charge, rocketing toward Berix. To the crowd, it looked like Metal had transformed into a circular saw.

>Berix got his shield up at the last second. The impact from Metal tore it out of his hands. Before Metal hit Berix, Metal bounced back, landing gracefully nearby. He stated tauntingly, "Shield threat neutralized. Target threat level minimum."
Berix screamed in rage and ran at him again. Metal teleported away from him, appearing above him.

>"V. Max Overdrive!"
He rocketed toward Berix, spinning like a tornado, his body surrounded in electricity. He hit Berix dead in the chest, sending him into the wall. He bounced off and fell to the ground, still.

>The announcer was practically screaming, "Look at that, people! The newbie has taken down the reigning champ! With a perfect fight at that! Unbelievable!"
Metal stood in the arena, basking in the glory of the cheers. It wouldn't be until Shadow ordered Omega to remove him that he snapped back to normal.

Kiina entered the ready room. She turned to Metal.

>"You really messed up Berix. A two hit K.O., that's a first."
She turned to them. "The judges have come to the decision that your red robot will compete in a vehicle match. They are infuriated that you disabled their crowd favorite."

>Omega stood and walked toward the entrance to the arena. "No machine can defeat me. I am the pinnacle of robotics."<p>

Omega stood across from a motorcycle vehicle. The infernal announcer kept bellowing.

>"Alright! Our next match is different than usual. On one side, we have Kirbraz and Scodonius, in their indominatable Kaxium V12! On the other, we have another newcomer, the invincible E-123 Omega! Poor guy, he can't hope to win this! Fight!"
The Kaxium peeled out and charged toward Omega. He stood strong, letting them come to him. One car fired a spiked fruit at him. He caught it, spun his torso like a top, and released it back at them, aiming for the joint in the cars.

>As the fruit closed on them, they split. One car kept coming, the larger breaking away. Omega readied himself, crouching and putting his hands forward.
As the vehicle hit him, he lifted with all his might, flipping the car. As the driver crawled out, Omega shifted his hand into a rocket launcher.

>"Worthless consumer model."
He fired, hitting the gas line. The vehicle exploded in a violent cloud of shrapnel. Omega turned his attention on the larger car. Kirbraz was coming at him with all he had. Omega unleashed his miniguns on him, peppering the vehicle with bullets. One hit the tire, blowing it out. The vehicle turned and flipped, flying toward the mech. Omega spun his wrist at high frequency, and punched the vehicle. It exploded.

>When the dust cleared, Omega was carrying Kirbraz on his shoulder, having protected the poor driver from his vehicle.
"I can't believe this, folks! Omega has single-handedly taken out both vehicles! What a match!"

Omega walked off the field, Kirbraz still on his shoulder. A question was forming in Kirbraz's mind.

>"Why did you save me? I was against you."
Omega swiveled his head toward the Agori, "Primary objective was to destroy enemy vehicles, not drivers. Secondary Directive dictates no collateral damage while completing an objective. I was forbidden to let you die."

>They walked back into the ready room. Omega said one last thing to Kirbraz. "I will assist in the rebuild and redesign of your 'Kaxium' vehicle."
Kirbraz jumped off Omega's shoulder and ran off toward the vehicle bay. Omega joined Metal in the group of people who had won.

>Joseph produced a carved stone. "This says that next will be an Agori Tag-Team match. The only ones we have left of that size are Shadow and Emerl."<p>

Emerl and Shadow stood on the field. The match was about to start, and the opposing team was down a man. Finally, a person ran onto the field. His body structure was different than an Agori's, but he was about the same size.

>"Finally, ladies and gentlemen, a replacement has arrived! Fighting for New Mangai, Raanu, former leader of Vulcanus, and Onepu, former captain of the Onu-Koro Ussalry, and current Captain of the Guard! For the newcomers, we have the self-proclaimed Ultimate Lifeform, Shadow the Hedgehog, and the dynamic fighter, Emerl! Fight!"
Shadow crossed his arms and waited. Emerl hopped up and down, as if he couldn't contain his energy. Raanu angled his firestaff at Shadow, and fired a firebolt at him. Shadow disappeared in a flash of blue, and reappeared in front of Raanu. The two started trading blows.

>Onepu grabbed a large stone that was lying around, and threw it at Emerl. Emerl dodged, his arm shifting into an Assault Rifle. He unloaded on Onepu, forcing him behind his shield.
Meanwhile, Shadow was gaining the upper hand with Raanu. Multiple teleport punches were wearing down Raanu's endurance. Shadow saw an opening, and charged a Chaos Spear. He warped away and threw the energy spear. It hit Raanu dead in the chest, and knocked him to the ground. A quick kick to the head knocked him out.

>While Shadow stood over Raanu, Emerl had had enough of his game of cat and mouse. A purple energy blade forming in place of his AR, he cut Onepu's shield in half and held his sword to Onepu's neck.
"Concede."

>Onepu looked around, and seeing Shadow standing over Raanu, dropped his eyes.
"I concede."

>Emerl deactivated his sword, and held his hand out. Onepu hesitated, and then took it. Emerl hauled him to his feet. The crowd cheered the victors.<p>

As they walked into the ready room, Kiina stormed out, pushing past the two. Emerl looked to Metal, and Metal shrugged. Joseph came out of a side room with a new tablet.

>"Ok, we have Adam up next in a fight against Kiina, then I fight a warrior named Ackar."
He turned to Adam, "Try not to kick her ass too hard."

Adam walked onto the field. The crowd was cheering Kiina's name. Raanu stood in the center. He motioned to the two fighters.

>"Alright, right in front of each other, now."
They stood facing each other. Kiina tried to make herself as big as possible, to intimidate Adam. Adam responded by drawing himself to his full

seven-and-a-half feet, immediately cowing Kiina's intentions of intimidation.

>Raanu signaled the start of the fight. Kiina twirled a double edged trident. Adam pulled his sword. They circled each other, trying to assess the other. Kiina made the first move, diving at a chink in his armor.
She bounced right off. Adam lifted his head and laughed. Kiina shook her head in confusion.

>"What inâ€|?"
Adam laughed again. "Good luck finding weakness in this armor. Energy shields, baby. The only thing on this armor actually useful."

>He suddenly went serious, kicking her in the chest. As she fell, he leapt onto her, his sword to her throat.
"Not so tough now, are ya?" he snarled, "Concede!"

>She did so, making this the quickest match so far.<p>

Joseph checked his Brute Shot, making sure its blade was sharp. Once he was ready, he walked out into the arena. Facing him was an aged red figure, wielding a sword styled like a flame.

>The warrior cocked his head, "Ready to lose, shiny?"
Joseph snarled and tightened his grip on his Brute Shot. As Raanu was about to start the fight, a huge boom was heard from above. Joseph looked up.

>A black and silver blur streaked and slammed into the ground, followed closely by a blue and red blur. As the black being locked weapons with the blue one, Joseph saw a skull carved into the mask of the blue one. A very familiar mask.
"Kerry?"

10. All Hell Breaks Loose

Chapter 10

>All Hell Breaks Loose<p>

Kerry punched the being in the face one last time, before standing and turning to Joseph. As Joseph looked closer, he saw variations in the armor. The shoulders were more rounded, like a knight's shoulders, the chest more closely following his muscle structure. Spikes stuck up from the back of the EVA helmet. On Kerry's back rested twin katana.

>Kerry nodded at him, "'Bout time ya got here."
Joseph walked toward his friend, shrugging, "Eh, shit happens."

>A claw reached up from the crater, grabbing Kerry and slamming his head into the ground. The black being rose, unfurling great, leathery wings. On one of his arms, instead of a hand, was a large, black sword. His mask was large, with a hood sweeping back, and spikes at the bottom. Joseph readied his Brute Shot.
"Who the hell're you?"

>The being indicated himself, "I? I am Vexorn, last of the Brotherhood. I am here to reclaim the trove sought by our illustrious leader, Teridax."
He held up Kerry, "This fool thought to destroy me and mine, but he was weak."

>Joseph tightened his grip on the barrel. "The Brotherhood? Of what?"
Vexorn laughed, "The Brotherhood of Makuta. The destined rulers of this planet, Spherus Magna!"

>He held out his hand, "Are you with us, or against us?"
Joseph snarled, "You hurt my friend! Of course I'm against you!"

>"So be itâ€|"
Vexorn gestured behind him. A large rumble was heard, as if a large creature was moving toward them. Joseph turned to Ackar.

>"Get the Agori to safety! We can handle this!"
Ackar nodded and

raised his sword in salute, before turning and running toward the ready room. Joseph turned to see Vexorn was flying. Dark clouds started to form in a spiral around him.

>"Behold!" he yelled, "The Visorak Horde!"
Over the wall, dark shapes started to crawl. As they crawled into the arena, Joseph saw them for what they were.

>Large, quadruped monsters. The snapping jaws, the spindly feet, and the webs they released all reminded Joseph of spiders. What was the worst thing about these "Visorak" was the cry. It was like a rusty chainsaw being used on sheet metal. It sent chills down his spine.
Omega tugged on his arm. Joseph looked down at the diminutive powerhouse.

>"We will fight these creatures," he stated, "You go after Vexorn."
"Are you sure?" he asked.

>Emerl backed up to them, firing his AR. "Go! We can take 'em!"
Joseph took one last look at his friends, turned, and started to run. He was stopped by a hand on his shoulder. He turned to see the grinning skull of Kerry's helmet staring back at him.

>"Ready?"
Joseph nodded. Kerry handed him the energy sword from his hip, and unsheathed his katana. Joseph ignited both his energy swords.

>Joseph leapt at the Makuta, swinging both his blades. As he was about to connect, a sphere of shadow surrounded his target. Undeterred, Joseph landed on the shield and started hammering away at it. Shadow flared after every hit, but nothing got through. On the other side, he saw Kerry sink a katana right into the shield, and with flashes of shadow and light, opened the shield.
Keeping the katana stuck like a key, Kerry pulled out his other and started to slash at Vexorn. As his blade bit deep into the Makuta's armor, Vexorn screamed and dropped the dark sphere. Disoriented, Joseph hit the ground hard. He immediately rolled and grabbed the Makuta's sword-hand. Twisting it around Vexorn's back, he stated, "Nice blade."

>Vexorn grunted, "Like it? Its name is Onukra-Nui."
Joseph nodded, "Yeah? Well, I like it so much, I might just have to take it."

>Vexorn laughed, "Good luck. This blade is fused to my armor. It will take much more than-"
CRUNCH!

>Vexorn screamed in pain and dropped to his knees, dark energy leaking from the stump that was his hand. Joseph held Onukra-Nui by the stem, the wires that fed into Vexorn's armor weaving into his armor's intake ports.
A notification popped onto his HUD.

>UNIDENTIFIED WEAPON. SEARCHING DATABANKS.
NEAREST MATCH: UNSC GAUSS RIFLE

>DISCREPANCY: CURRENT WEAPON DAMAGE ASSESSMENT OVER 300% ABOVE PREVIOUSLY STATED WEAPON.
NEW MATCH: UNSC FRIGATE MAGNETIC ACCELERATOR CANNON.

>Joseph stared at his screen in astonishment. This blade was powerful. With a thought, the blade split in half. He held the two sides in a staff style, and jumped at Vexorn.
He never reached him. As he was about to connect, a blast his HUD identified as a fuel rod shot knocked him flying. As he flipped, landing smoothly on the ground, he saw three newcomers.

>One was blue, with a massive claw on one hand and a zweihander-style icy sword in the other. It walked with the grace of a female, but had the head of a hideous bat.
The second was dark red, wielding twin paladin swords. The swords were connected by a long chain, which wrapped around his body. His face was that of a scowling monster.

>The third was silver, with Forerunner script running across his body. A monitor was nestled in his chest, and large metallic wings, with holographic skin between the bones, sprouted from his back. One of his hands was a large-caliber gun barrel, smoking green. It was Ethan.
He laughed, "Well, I knew it was only a matter of time before you caught up to me." As he said this, his gun-arm started to glow green.

>Joseph reacted quickly. Fusing his sword, he leapt into the air. As Ethan swiveled to track him, Joseph pointed the sword at him and yelled "Fire!"
A massive concussion knocked everyone off their feet. A large object flashed toward Ethan at Mach 7. He had no time to react. The slug hit him.

>Kerry turned to Joseph, only to find the SPARTAN was missing. He whirled around, trying to locate the soldier. He heard a noise and looked up.
A white and brown blur shot toward him at high speed. Kerry side stepped and let it crash into the ground. After the dust settled, a small crater sat where the blur had landed. As he walked to the edge of the crater, a hand shot up. It grabbed the edge, and out of the crater crawled Joseph. Kerry grabbed his hand and hauled him out.

>"Next time, don't jump."
Joseph just glared at him. They looked around, just now realizing how far the battle had taken them from New Mangai's arena. As they contemplated the recent fight, a metal spike flew by them.

>Ethan rose from his crater, supported by the two dark beings. The monitor glared at him. "You think a pitiful MAC can defeat me?" he gasped, "Well, I think again!"
Joseph watched the two beings. The red one shot what seemed to be a questioning look at Kerry. Joseph glanced at his friend, and saw he was shaking his head.

>"Glorious leader, maybe we should leave," the red one said to Ethan, "You are wounded. We need to regroup with Vexorn and the Doctor."
Ethan nodded in assent. "Right you are, Drenix. Let's go."

>The trio took flight, leaving to parts unknown. When Kerry didn't move, Joseph rounded on Kerry.
"What the hell was that!?"

>Kerry cocked his head, "What do you mean?"
Joseph exploded, "You know what I fucking mean! That red dude looked at you like you were his boss or something! What was that about!?"

>Kerry held up a hand. "You ever hear the saying, 'The enemy of my enemy is my friend?'"
That brought Joseph up short. "Yeah. Why?"

>Kerry went on, "Drenix, the red one, was a Toa, a warrior-champion, posted in Vulcanus. When Vexorn sacked the city, he kidnapped his comrade, Meznia, and corrupt her into a Shadow Toa. I entered this universe during the battle. Remember, after Alpha Halo, how I infiltrated the Covenant and influenced the Arbiter to rebel?"
Joseph nodded.

>"Well, we did something similar here. We had Miserix, the last 'good' Makuta, turn Drenix into a Shadow Toa, and sent him in as a spy. While he was there, he reported back that Meznia was a different being now. Her sanity was gone, and Vexorn had experimented on her. He hated what they had done to her, but agreed to stay as a spy."
Joseph shook his head, "So, Drenix is a good guy?"

>Kerry nodded.
As they turned to walk toward New Mangai, Joseph muttered, "This place just gets weirder and weirder."

Chapter 11

>A Cross-Dimensional War<p>

Kerry paced the situation room. They had gathered to organize a counterassault against Ethan, Dr. Eggman, and Vexorn. During the most recent raid. Metal and Omega had fallen into Vexorn's hands. While Shadow had activated the remote shut-off, it was only a matter of time before Eggman managed to turn on Metal, and Omega was probably already running.

>Toa Mata Tahu, a stocky, red Toa with a helmet-like mask, fire sword, and temper to match, slammed his fist to the table. "We need action! Not only are Metal Sonic and Omega there, but Drenix, Natalie, and Joey as well!"
Ackar cut in, "We need to mobilize all the strength we can. Not only will we have to fight Visorak and Rakkshi, but the Doctor's forces as well."

>Kerry spoke up, "I'm still not certain about bringing in our vehicles. We don't know what could result from the merging of realities.
Toa Mahri Jaller, a tall, red-and-orange Toa who excelled in aquatic missions, countered, "You're here, aren't you? We've already added human and E.G.G. tech, what does it matter? We don't know what would happen if Dr. Eggman gained control of this world!"

>"Eggman isn't our problem."
The four in the room looked to the door. Sonic walked in the doorway, followed closely by Shadow.

>"It seems to me," he started, "As though this 'Ethan' might be a bigger threat. I know Eggman, and while he's smarter than anyone, he is incompetent. The real brains has got to be the monitor."
Kerry rubbed his temples, "Fine. Shadow, get word to Lord Hood that we need vehicular support. Have him send vehicles, but not many personnel, only those who can pilot. Sonic, get anyone you can. Have G.U.N. send robots, and get the Rogues. We need their airship."

>Both hedgehogs saluted. Shadow walked away, his finger on his ear. Sonic disappeared in a blue blur. Kerry turned to Ackar.
"Have Kirbraz and Scodonious finished Omega's modifications yet?"

>Ackar nodded, "Just informed me this morning."
Kerry clutched the table. "And so, we shall go to warâ€¦"

Days later, Kerry and his team stood at the useless gate at the back of New Mangai. The portal had been set up here, as it was the only place big enough to fit a Pelican or a Phantom. The portal glowed the metallic green of his universe.

>Pelicans, Phantoms, Banshees, Hornets, and Falcons flew out of the portal. All manner of vehicle came through. A Warthog that had been trailing skidded to a stop in front of him, and a female Marine with red hair got out.
Kerry held out his hand, "Long time, no see, Julie."

>She took it, "You've been gone a year, Colonel."
Kerry cocked his head. "My chronometer says three months."

>She shrugged, "Time travel differently across realities. It took us four months to mobilize this cavalry for you."
"It's been three days here."

>They walked toward the situation room. When they got there, she unfurled a large, circular holomat over the table. Kerry turned to her. "I need you to go teach the Toa and Agori drivers how to use these vehicles, Lieutenant. I'll update you when you're done."
Julie saluted, and walked out of the room. Kerry turned back to the table. He looked at the leaders surrounding him, and turned on the mat. "Okay, We haveâ€¦"

In a week, all of Spherus Magna was geared for assault. All the Toa and drivers had been briefed on vehicle use, and the leaders were informed of strategic points of attack. Kerry paced in front of the horde.

>"Today, we will assault the Makuta Stronghold. Many of you will not survive this encounter. If any of you wish not to participate in this battle, we understand. Please step forward."
No one dared step forward. Kerry clapped his hands.

>"Very well. Now, we fight! Unity! Duty! Destiny!"
The crowd screamed. Kerry turned and climbed into a Warthog. Julie took the wheel, and Joseph got on the turret. Kerry unsheathed one of his katana, and raised it high.

>"All troops! Move out!"
The convoy started forward. After an hour across the wasteland, they saw an army of Visorak, supported by a group of Rahkshi fliers. Kerry stood, bracing his foot on the dash.

>"Hold steady!"
He unslung his rocket launcher. He sighted on the nearest Rahkshi.

>"Attack!"
He fired, the rocket corkscrewing towards the mech. It hit, knocking the creature from the sky. Joseph opened up on the turret, blasting scores of Rahkshi from the sky.

>The battle lasted for 2 hours like this. Kerry started to get worried. The Visorak and Rahkshi just kept coming. He saw the Scorpion next to him explode from a direct hit from a Panrahk, a Fragmentation-Rahkshi. He saw the thing turn to them.
"Julie, SWERVE!"

>She put the 'Hog into a skid, struggling to get the beast under control. The Panrahk fired at them.
The shot hit the engine block, knocking the Warthog flying. Kerry leapt out of the airborne vehicle with his katana. He spun, his blades decapitating the Rahkshi. The creature spasmed, the kraata inside going into its death throes. The staff discharged multiple times, all missing him. He heard an explosion behind him.

>He turned to see the Warthog on fire. He ran to the car, and saw Joseph holding the chassis up. Julie lay beside him, bruised but alive. Kerry pulled her out, and flipped the 'Hog off Joseph. He helped his friend up.
"Thanks for saving my ass!"

>Kerry shrugged, "You owe me."
The three heard a noise like chainsaws. They stood back to back, looking at the army of what they had thought were dead Suukorak that surrounded them.

>Kerry shook his head, "I really, REALLY hate those things!"
Energy started to form inside their Rhotuka launchers.

>"Guys," Kerry started, "If this is the end, it's been an honor serving with you both!"
They braced themselves for the end. Slowly, above the chittering Visorak, they heard a noise like a chopper.

>"YEE-HAW!"
A red-and-black cycle crashed through the ranks. It drifted in a circle, twin mounted miniguns firing. Soon, all the Suukorak were dead. The cycle stopped, and out jumped Kirbraz.

>Kerry knelt down to the Agori, "Man, are we glad to see you!"
The Agori shrugged, "I saw the Suukorak. Them buggers been laying ambushes all over here. Scodonius is in the side-car, helping the Toa contingent."

>Joseph butted in, "Bro, can you give us a ride to Vexorn's base?"
Kirbraz shook his head, "Not enough room, man. Sorry."

>Julie pointed toward the battlefield. "What about one of them?"
Kerry looked and saw a sight that renewed his faith in

miracles. There, shining in the sun was a Hornet in perfect condition.

>He ran up to the vehicle and hopped on the skid. Joseph did the same on the other side. Julie walked over to them and gave the vehicle a once-over.
"Guys, I don't think I'm rated to fly thisâ€|"
>Kerry facepalmed. "You can pilot a Pelican, right?"
"Yeahâ€|"

>"Last I heard, controls were standardized. If you can fly a bird, you can fly a bug."
Julie nodded and hopped into the pilot's chair. The Hornet took off.

>They overflowed the battlefield. They saw the Agori doing a good job holding off Visorak with the 'Hogs, and using the Wraiths to shell their command posts. The Toa had all abandoned their vehicles and were fighting close quarters.
Kerry saw four blurs running in and out of enemy territory. The blue, black, and orange he recognized. The fourth, the brownish-tan one, was what got him. He activated the scan mode on his helmet and zeroed in on it. Text scrolled across his HUD.

>NAME: POHATU NUVA
SPECIES: UNKNOWN (SUBJECT CONTAINS ONLY GENETIC CODE FOR TOA AND TURAGA. ALL MATORAN GENES REMOVED.

>ELEMENT: STONE
WEAPONS: CLIMBING CLAWS

>MASK: KANOHI KAKAMA, MASK OF SPEED
Kerry breathed a sigh of relief. Other than the genetic anomaly, which could be attributed to the range of the scan, he checked out against personnel records.

>They crossed into enemy territory. Rhotuka flew toward him, acting as anti-air shots. Julie managed to dodge all of them, and landed near the entrance of Vexorn's hideout. Kerry and Joseph leapt off the skids and cleared the landing zone. Once that was done, he commed Shadow.
"Black Blur, this is Alpha One, do you read?"

>"Reading you loud and clear, Alpha One."
"Black Blur, we have arrived at the target. Requesting your assistance in completing our objective."

>"On my way, Alpha One."
A few seconds later, the Black Blur skidded to a stop next to them. Kerry tossed him the Shadow Rifle, and together, the four of them entered the base.

12. Invasion of Privacy

Chapter 12

>Invasion of Privacy<p>

The squad entered the base. Almost immediately, two Fear-Rahkshi jumped out at them. Both Kerry and Joseph pulled out their MA-5Bs. Kerry dropped to a crouch, while Joseph fired over his head. Soon, the Rahkshi were nothing but shredded metal and pulped gore.

>As the group moved on, they saw a massive door. When they got to it, Joseph gave a pull. It wouldn't budge.
"Good thing I brought a key," he mumbled, unsheathing Onukra-Nui. Kerry held out a hand to stop him.

>"We do it my way first."
Kerry walked to the door and, standing next to the hinge, knocked loudly. He stood silently and waited.

>The door opened, and a raspy Shadow Matoran voice asked, "Yes?"
Kerry slammed the door on him, sending the poor creature flying. He opened the door, shaking his head. "They don't make doormen like they used to."

>They filed in. They appeared to be in a prison. Kerry saw many creatures imprisoned in stasis fields. Not all of them were inhuman.

Shadow walked over to a field where a plumber in red and blue overalls was held. He knocked on the field. The being stirred, but did not wake.
Julie looked into another. In it was a blond man in a green tunic. A sword and shield were strapped to his back, and a weird symbol was tattooed onto his left hand. It looked like three little triangles were being used to make one large triangle.

>Joseph found one that contained a small black creature with a silver facemask. A cape billowed behind him, an image of bat wings sewn into the fabric. He wore shoulder pauldrons, the left having an insignia of an M with a sword through the middle, making an N.
Kerry saw that one of the fields had a conscious prisoner. A beautiful female in a blue bodysuit. Purple markings covered her back and chest. He cocked his head at her and mouthed, "Why are you here?"

>She just shook her head and pointed at a control panel in the middle of the room. Kerry looked at it and saw, in Matoran, the words Release Controls above it. He went to it and selected pods MM-294, LHT-475, MK-853, and SA-010.
As one, the stasis pods the team had been studying cut out. Shadow caught the plumber before he hit the ground. Julie jumped out of the way as the man in the tunic fell in front of her. As the pod opened, the black being Joseph was studying opened his eyes and teleported away. The woman in front of Kerry landed gracefully in front of him.

>Kerry asked her, "Who are you?"
The woman simply said, "Samus."

>Kerry looked around. Shadow was slapping the plumber across the face, and Julie was trying to coax the man awake. Shadow woke his up first.
"Mama mia!" the plumber muttered, "What happened?"

>"Take it easy, my friend," Shadow implored, "You were imprisoned."
The plumber shook his head. "Shadow? Where am I?"

>Kerry walked over. "You're in an alternate dimension. My guess is Vexorn and Eggman are trying to rid the dimensions of heroes."
He held his hand out, "My name's Kerry, from HaloEarth. Yours?"

>The plumber held out his hand. "Mario Mario, from the Mushroom Kingdom."
Julie had succeeded in waking the green man. He sat up and held his head.

>Julie asked, concerned, "Are you alright?"
The man nodded.

>Julie pressed on, "What's your name? Where are you from?"
He paused, and in a voice that sounded like it had never been used before, said, "My name's Link. From Hyrule."

>Julie smiled, "Well, Link, if you go stand by the short plumber over there, we'll tell you what happened."
Link nodded and walked over to Mario.

>Joseph looked around frantically. "Where'd he go!?"
A whooshing sound came from behind him. He turned and saw the small black being standing there.

>Joseph tentatively asked, "Who're you?"
The creature responded in a slight Spanish accent, "Meta Knight, from Dream Land. What happened?"

>Kerry walked over to him. "You were captured by Dr. Eggman and the Makuta Vexorn. Do any of you know who we are?"
Mario nodded, "We know Shadow. When the Hands forced us to fight each other, they turned Shadow into a trophy for use during the fights."

>Kerry cocked his head, puzzled. Shadow looked at him with a look that said "Later."
"Okay," Joseph started, "Who's gonna help us?"

>Mario nodded. Link raised his sword in assent. Meta Knight simply

grunted.
Kerry turned toward the last one of the group. "Samus?"

>She got up from her sitting position on the floor. Energy arced over her body, and a suit of armor appeared over her body. It was orange and red, with green LEDs over certain surfaces. A cannon was fixed over her right arm.
"Now I'm ready," she stated simply.

>As the group split up, Joseph asked Meta Knight, "Why don't you take off the mask?"
"I will wear it until I die. My ancestors would want it that way."

>Joseph shrugged, "To each his own..."<p>

Kerry and Samus ran north. They hit a door. Kerry opened it, and Samus ran in, clearing the room. The shooting stopped, and Samus called to Kerry, "You better get in here!"

>Kerry ran in, rifle up. What he saw sent chills down his spine.
Multiple stasis tanks, all of varying sizes, were housed in this room. Kerry saw many different creatures housed in these tanks. A giant penguin with a hammer. A large bionic dragon. Even something that looked like a dinosaur with a spiked turtle shell. Kerry cocked his head at this one.

>"Oh, my God!"
Kerry whirled, and saw Samus standing in front of two tanks, her hand on one of them. Kerry walked over to her, and looked at the tanks.

>Each held a giant hand. The one on the left, the right hand, was floating calmly. The one on the right, the left hand, was curled up in a feral-looking position. Kerry turned to Samus.
"Who are they?"

>Samus's helmet tilted down, and her helmet lost cohesiveness and disappeared. Her eyes were closed. "They're the Hands. The ones that forced us to fight in that stupid tournament."
Kerry cocked his head, "Why would you care?"

>She looked at him. "If they are capable of capturing the Hands, who knows what else they can do. Don't you realize what this is?"
Kerry shook his head.

>Samus slammed her fist into the tank. "They are harvesting villains. That giant penguin is King DeDeDe, Meta Knight's enemy. That turtle, that's Bowser, the King of Koopa's. He's Mario's villain. And that dragon, that's Meta Ridley."
Kerry asked, "And who is it the enemy of?"

>Samus looked down at her feet again. "Mine. He was the one who killed my parents on K-2L."
Kerry realized how hard it was for her to see her villain brought so low, so easily, by someone other than her. He put a hand on her shoulder. "Listen, I understand how it feels to have the enemy in possession of something more powerful than you. In my reality, we have an array of seven rings known as the Halos. This array is so powerful, when fired, it would wipe out all sentient life in the galaxy. The last year of the War, it was us and them fighting over them. We took the rings, but the Caretaker of the rings themselves betrayed us. He was destroyed, but not without cost."

>He paused to take a breath, "What I'm saying is, even when the odds are stacked against you, there is always a chance of success."
Samus looked at him and smiled. "Thanks, I needed that."

>Her helmet rematerialized. Kerry looked around at the containers. "Who do you think is safe to let out?"
Samus thought for a second. "I think DeDeDe is okay. Bowser, too."

>Kerry walked over to a tank that just contained a puddle of water. "What do you think this is?"
Samus looked at it. "Scans say it is from Mobius. It is certainly emitting Chaos Energy."

>Kerry commed Shadow. "Hey, what do you know about a puddle of water that emits Chaos Energy?"
There was a pause as Kerry listened to the reply. "Well, do you think it's alright to release it?"
Again, a pause. "Okay. If it give us any problems, we'll comm you."
Kerry turned to Samus. "Evidently, this is the Mobian God of Destruction, Chaos. Shadow says he is also the God of Peace, so it should be safe to release him."

>Samus walked to the control terminal in the center of the room and hit three buttons. The stasis fields around DeDeDe, Bowser, and Chaos disappeared. Bowser and Dedede hit the floor hard. Chaos just kinda slopped out of the tank and scattered.
Bowser got up, clutching his head. He spoke in a voice that resembled a growl, "What happened? I remember that fat slob Eggman coming into my chambers in the castle, then nothingâ€¦"

>Dedede also held his head. The penguin spoke with a South-Western accent, "Yeah, I remember the same thing. What gives?"
"We'll tell you everything, once we find Chaos," Kerry said.

>A watery voice spoke out behind him, "I sense a large amount of Chaos in you, Armored One."
Kerry spun around, to see a being about Sonic's height standing before him. He was made completely out of water, and Kerry could see his brain. He had bright green eyes.

>"Chaos?"
The being nodded. "Now, tell us, Armored One, why have we been taken out of our dimensions?"

>Kerry nodded. "Right. Eggman and the Makuta Vexorn have been taking Heroes and Villains from most of the dimensions and draining their power. They've already drained the Hands, and started work on Ridley. If we hadn't gotten here, you would have been drained, too."
Dedede held up a hand, "Whoa, hang on just a second. You're tellin' us that they're drainin' our energy? For what?"

>"That, we don't knowâ€¦" Kerry stated slowly.
Bowser looked at Dedede and Chaos. "I don't know about you two, but I want some revenge!"

>Dedede nodded, "I agree. Eggman's gotta pay for this."
Even Chaos believed in some kind of retribution. "Eggman released me from the Master Emerald once, and forced me to wreak havoc on Station Square. It will not happen again."

>"Okay, then," Kerry stated, "We should meet up with the others in the Hero Containment Room."<p>

As Kerry and Samus ran north toward the Villain Containment Room, Shadow and Mario ran west. After a few rooms, they came across a R.O.B. Launcher. Shadow made to move forward, but Mario grabbed his shoulder.

>"No, don't," he stated, "If the R.O.B. Squad is working for Eggman, the Ancient Minister must be around here somewhere."
Shadow cocked his head, "Ancient Minister?"

>Mario nodded, "The original Robotic Operating Buddy. He controls the Squad. Either Eggman got control of him, or he's keeping him as insurance for their help."
Shadow thought back for a second. "You know, there was one of those things, a white and red one, in the Containment Room."

>Mario practically jumped for joy. "Yes, that's him! That's the Ancient Minister!"
Suddenly, a chirp was heard over Shadow's comm. He put a finger to his ear.

>"Shadow hereâ€¦wait, a puddle of water that's emitting Chaos energy? Sounds like Chaos, the god of destructionâ€¦It should be, he's now a peace god. Sonic helped him with thatâ€¦alright. Bye."
He looked at Mario. "C'mon, let's go find the Ancient Minister"

>The two headed back to the Hero Containment Room. Shadow located the

proper tank, Unit FR-101, Mario hit the release button.
The Ancient Minister's eyes flared red for a second, then reverted to black. He turned to Mario.

>"Hello, Mario."
Mario tipped his hat.

>The Ancient Minister turned to Shadow, "Who are you?"
Shadow grunted, "My name is Shadow the Hedgehog."

>The Ancient Minister's voice took on a more robotic tone, and his eyes turned green, "SCANNING. SUBJECT: SHADOW. SPECIES: CROSS BREED OF BLACK ARMS AND HEDGEHOG. UNKNOWN ENERGY SIGNATURE DETECTED IN SUBJECT. NEAREST READINGS MATCH: SUPER SONIC."
His eyes turned back to black. "There, now the R.O.B. Squad should see you as a friendly."

>Mario looked at his feet, "Yeah, about thatâ€¦"
The Ancient Minister's head swiveled toward him. "About what?"

>Mario looked at him sadly. "We think that Eggman managed to find a way to circumvent your control of the R.O.B. Squad. They are patrolling this base as guards."
The Ancient Minister's eyes flashed white, and he looked down at his propulsion unit, "No, that can't be. I have absolute control."

>Shadow muttered something in the background. The Ancient Minister looked at him, and his eyes flashed red. "You have a comment, Shadow?"
Shadow drew himself up to his full height, which was still a bit smaller than the Minister. "Yeah. I said if you have absolute control, how did Tabuu take over your island, when you easily could have wiped him out? How did Ganondorf force the R.O.B. Squad to detonate those bombs, even after you ordered them not to? In my opinion, you're just another machine with a god complex!"

>The Minister moved straight up to Shadow, his arms in a fighting stance. "Don't ever, EVER, mention that event again! Many of my allies, my friends, died during that war! Do you have any idea how that feels?!"
Shadow got right up to the Minister's face. "Don't think for one second that you're the only one who has things they wish they could take back! Because of me, an entire space station was wiped out! Countless civilians were killed so G.U.N. could eliminate a 'threat to humanity'! Maria, my friend, was shot in cold blood as she helped me escape! An entire city was destroyed, our president nearly killed, just so Black Doom could transport his Comet to Earth, because of deal made during my creation! In a future that I helped erase, I was responsible for the release of a demon creature that destroyed the world! I nearly killed everyone! Don't you dare, not for one minute, think that you have a monopoly on bad memories!"

>By this time, Shadow's black fur had tinted red, and his eyes were bloodshot. An aura of red surrounded him. The Ancient Minister moved back, stunned. His eyes cycled yellow, and he looked down at his propulsion unit. Shadow got control of his anger, and turned to leave. As he was halfway across the room, he heard R.O.B. speak. "Shadowâ€¦"
Shadow stopped, and turned his head slightly in the direction of the Minister. The motion did not go unnoticed by the robot.

>"I'm sorryâ€¦about Maria. Really, I am. I realize we all have problems, but those are the past. We need to focus on the now. Can we just start over?"
Shadow paused for a second, considering the robot's words. Finally, he responded.

>"Don't slow me down."<p>

When the three got to the place where the Launcher was, it had moved on. They went forward. Soon, they found a computer room. Shadow immediately turned to his two allies.

>"If either of you dare say 'computer room', I swear to God I will

kill us all right now."
Mario gulped. The Minister simply nodded, and moved to a terminal. He jacked into it, and his eyes turned purple.

>An alarm blared. Suddenly, doors all around them opened. R.O.B. Squad members filed into the room. The Minister turned his head toward the doors.
"What's going on!?"

>Shadow turned to him. "You're buddies here are trying to kill us!"
His eyes flashed blue. The R.O.B. Squad all turned to look at him. Their eyes flashed the same color for a split second, then flashed back to red.

>Shadow dodged a rocket and looked toward the Minister. "What the hell did you do?!"
The Minister shook his head. "I can't control them! I don't think these are mine!"

>Mario ducked under a laser. "We'll keep em busy! See if you can see what they're doing here!"
The Minister nodded and turned back to the terminal.

>Shadow jumped out of the way of a Gyro, and Chaos Backhanded a Sentry. He whirled, and with a flash of energy, Chaos Speared two more. Three of the Launchers saw him, and opened fire.
Skating towards them, his hands wreathed in Chaos energy, he quickly deflected all three missiles and double-fist punched a hole clean through the middle Launcher. Violently pulling his hands out to the sides, he damaged the other two's rocket ability. He finished with a Chaos Launcher that sent them flying.

>While this was going on, Mario was dealing with his own problems. He fireballed two of the Launchers, then Tornadoed another. As one of the sentries closed in, he crouched, and then unleashed a Super Jump Punch. He turned, and seeing a missile, whacked it with his cape. The missile changed direction and hit the Launcher straight in the head.
As more and more started to file in, Mario and Shadow quickly realized that they would be soon outnumbered. Mario realized what he had to do.

>"Shadow," he ordered, "Stay behind me!"
Shadow obliged, launching spear after spear at the R.O.B.s. Mario concentrated, focusing all his energy into his hands, until they were literally ablaze. He jumped into a launching stance.

>"Oh, yes!"
He abruptly released all his power into twin streams that spiraled around each other, expanding all the while. The R.O.B.s were all caught in the inferno, and were all incinerated.

>As the Mario Finale ended, Mario slumped forward. Shadow caught him, only to find out he was unconscious.
Suddenly, the Minister stated in a monotone, "DOWNLOAD: COMPLETE."

>Mario slung over his shoulder, Shadow walked over to him.
"What did you find?"

>The Minister unjacked from the computer and stated in shock, "You are not going to believe this."
Shadow smirked, "Test me."

>"It appears as though Eggman and Vexorn are NOT in charge, as per our previous assumption. It appears a 'monitor' named Ethan is running the entire operation."
Shadow shook his head, "Not important. What are they doing here?"

>"If I am analyzing this correctly, he is-"
The Minister made a gasping noise that sounded like an old computer was overheating.

>"-he is using all the people stored at this facility to create an ultimate form for himself. Good thing so far he's only managed to copy one trait."
"And what would that be?"

>"Meta Ridley's wings. It also says here that-"
Abruptly, he stopped. His eyes flashed red several times, and he looked to the ceiling. He let out a cry of anguish. His eyes shuttered closed, and his shoulders dropped to his base. He arms fell limp to the floor.

>He was muttering, "Nononononononononono."
Suddenly, his monotone replaced his normal voice. "Core system overload. Emotional distress has caused signifigant heat damage to core CPU. Rebooting CPU."

>The Minister shut down, then just as quickly came back online.

Shadow walked over to him.
"You all right?"

>His head slumped again. "All of them...he killed all of them...just to prove a point...what kind of monster is he?"
"What happened," Shadow demanded, "Who did who kill?"

>The Minister let out a mechanical sigh. "Ethan...he killed them...my kin...just to prove a point and...force me to go with him...I had erased it from my memory, but an echo of that data remains. This revelation reawakened it."
Shadow put a hand on his shoulder.

"Well, my little Robotic Operating Buddy, we must avenge your kin. Ethan has caused hell in three universes now, and will continue to do so until we kill him for good. So, in the memory of those fallen on Alpha Halo and the Ark, and of the now endangered Ancient race, and of all the people he has hurt during this folly, we will press on, and we will kill him. I swear to god."

>The Ancient Minister nodded, his resolve cemented. "Shadow, just one thing..."
Shadow looked him, arms crossed. "What?"

>"Call me R.O.B."<p>

13. The Confrontation on Spherus Magna

Chapter 13

>The Confrontation on Spherus Magna<p>

Shadow, ROB, and Mario sprinted back to the Hero Containment Room. There, they met the other groups.

>Shadow, panting, asked, "Well, what did you find?"
Kerry started. "We found out that they are capturing villains as well. It appears they are trying to create some kind of supermonster."

>ROB shook his head, "Not they. Only one is responsible for this."
Kerry stated, amused, "Do tell."

>Shadow looked up. "Ethan."
Kerry reeled as if struck. He shook his head, "Really?"

>Mario nodded. "Yes. Vexorn and Eggman are just pawns in a bigger game Ethan is playing."
Shadow chuckled, "I doubt the Doctor has any idea he is being manipulated. And from what I hear, Makuta are opportunistic. We just have to wait, and eventually they will tear each other to shreds."

>ROB's eyes flashed red. Ever the eloquent speaker, he said angrily, "And if they don't? How many worlds could fall? Mobius, Haloeearth, Hyrule, or the World of Trophies that links them all together? This planet is already suffering from a massive meteor impact. It doesn't need our meddling. I say we finish this here and now, before we destroy it completely!"
Shadow had been listening in the background while he conversed on the comm. He took this time to step forward. "It's too late for that. Vulcanus and New Mangai have been overrun. UNSC Marines and the Guardian Unit of Nations are helping evacuate everyone through the Rift. This reality is lost."

>Everyone looked downcast. Watching them, Shadow continued, "We can still end it here. But, first, we need to get the heroes out of here."
Samus and ROB nodded, and went to the terminal. With ROB's hacking, Samus was able to do a master unlock on the pods.

>Joseph looked out over the crowd. "Is that everyone?"
Mario

looked around frantically, "I can't see Wario! He was captured with me!"

>Link nodded, "Sameâ€|Ganondorfâ€|"
Shadow raised an eyebrow, "Well, are they heroes?"

>Mario shook his head, "More like mild villains. Except Ganondorf, but I'm pretty sure he will side with us. If Hyrule is under threat of destruction, he will fight."
Link agreed, "Soundsâ€|likeâ€|himâ€|"

>Kerry nodded. "ROB, Samus, with me! The rest of you, get them out of here. Only keep the useful and the experienced. No young ones!"<p>

When Kerry got back, Wario and Ganondorf in tow, he saw a small number of heroes had stayed. Mario introduced them.

>"This is Luigi, my brother," he said, pointing to a green-garbed plumber. Luigi waved shyly.
Pointing at a large gorilla and a spider monkey, "This is Donkey Kong, and his nephew Diddy." Both beat their chests.

>Meta Knight indicated a small pink puffball. "This is Kirby. He may be a baby, but he is also a Star Warrior."
The puff in question looked up at Kerry and made a soft "poyo" sound.

>Two kids, one at least six and the other about twelve walked forward. The six-year-old introduces them.
"Hi! My name is Ness, and this is Red!"

>Red nodded.
Kerry shook his head. "Unless you can do something powerful, you both need to high-tail it out of here."

>Ness nodded. "Watch."
He turned to a control station. His body started to spark.

>"PK Thunder!"
A ball of lightning shot out of him and hit the terminal. The shock overloaded it, and it exploded. Ness turned to Kerry, triumphant.

>Kerry turned to Red. "And what do you do?"
Red smiled and pulled three red balls from his belt. He threw them, yelling, "Go! Squirtle! Ivysaur! Charizard!"

>The balls opened, and a beam of red light shot out of each. The beams materialized into a turtle, a weird hybrid of plant and dinosaur, and a dragon. Red pointed at another terminal.
"Take this! Triple Finish!"

>The three creatures unleashed a powerful combo attack on the terminal. When the shockwave subsided, nothing was left.
Kerry nodded, impressed. He looked, and noticed a weird black creature that seemed to stay in the same orientation to his eyes no matter how he looked at it.

>"What's that thing?"
Mario stepped forward. "That's Mr. Game & Watch. He's a weird creature from the Flat Zone. He is actually two-dimensional, but his body makes it impossible to see that."

>Game & Watch made a "beep" noise and walked over to Kerry. He pulled out a frying pan and tossed some bacon at him. Kerry caught it and laughed.
"Alright, he's in!"

>Joseph looked and saw a cardboard box lying where a box shouldn't be lying. He walked over and lifted the box.
Crouching inside was a man in a camo suit. A headband encircled his head. Weapons covered his body. He looked up, startled.

>Joseph chuckled, "And who are you?"<p>

Joseph cocked his head. "Strong, silent type, huh? I asked your name, soldier!"

>The man grunted, "Snakeâ€|Solid Snakeâ€|"
Joseph held out his hand. "Welcome to the team, Snake."

>Snake hesitated, then grabbed the hand. Joseph hauled him up.
Kerry called them all together. "Alright, we need to find Ethan. If he escapes here, he will wreak havoc on the rest of reality. This has to be a stand! Who's with us?"
>DK and Diddy immediately walked to Kerry's side, followed by Joseph and Meta Knight. Kirby trailed Meta Knight like a puppy. Mario walked over, dragging Luigi. Wario looked puzzled for a second, then waddled over to Mario. Link stood by Kerry, and Ganondorf, seeing this, walked over as well. Bowser quickly followed. Mr. Game & Watch moved to Kerry's side, followed by Julie and King Dedede. ROB and Shadow looked at each other, and walked over. Chaos followed Shadow, and Snake close after that. Finally, Red and Ness joined the group.
Kerry clapped his hands together, "Alright! We march on!"

>They ran through the door that led to Ethan, and were immediately attacked by ROB's. Chaos oozed in front and forced himself inside one. The ROB sparked and jerked, before its eyes turned the cool green of Chaos's eyes. ChaosROB looked at ROB and nodded. As one, they fired their lasers into the crowd. For about one hundred yards they cleared the path, until they got to the elevator. Once inside the extremely cramped device, they ascended.

>When they got to the top, they all fell out the doors.
"Neverâ€|againâ€|" complained Bowser, who had been forced into the back due to his spines.

>Suddenly, a blue and black being flashed in front of them. It was Meznia.
"No one sees the master," she declared.

>Kerry moved forward, twin katana at the ready. The rest of the group ran past them, leaving just the two of them.
There was no trading of words, no verbal puns used for intimidation. Just action.

>Kerry lunged forward in a spiraling motion, intent on cutting the Toa down. Meznia simply caught the blades with her own, and with her claw, slugged Kerry in the stomach. Hard.
She released him. He lay on the ground, trying to catch his breath.

>"You'reâ€|goodâ€|" he said, gasping.
His fusion pack flared, and his armor turned from blue to flat black. Even his visor changed. He looked up.

>"I'm betterâ€|"
He charged, his katana emitting both Dark and Light energy. Every blow he made, Meznia blocked. The more she resisted, the more his Emerald absorbed the Shadow in her and turned it into power. As he kept attacking, he felt her guard breaking. Feeling a win coming, he let loose a power slash.

>Meznia responded with one of her own. The force of the blow shattered the cold metal of his swords. She had spent the time guarding slowly freezing his blades. He stumbled back from the force of the blow, and reached for his Energy Sword, only to remember he had given it to Joseph when he got the katana.
Enraged, his fusion pack flared again, and his armor turned red. Dark energy swirled around his hands. With a blast of energy, he rocketed toward Meznia. Seeing it coming, she dove to the side.

>As she hit the ground, she felt herself being tossed into the air. As she tried to get her bearings, she felt her sword get torn from her grasp. She hit the floor hard.
As she got up, she saw Kerry looking at her blade. Seeing her move, he looked at her.

>"This is a nice blade," he said, "Where did you get it?"
"Vexornâ€|made it," she hissed, struggling to get up, "Too muchâ€|shadow for youâ€|anywayâ€|"

>Kerry raised the blade, "Are you sure?"
To her amazement, his fusion pack opened. The very shadow of the sword appeared to be drawn to the open pack. As she watched, the dark iron of the blade cleared, leaving a pure silver sword. The ice, which before had been like

obsidian, was now a healthy blue.

>Kerry raised his other hand. The darkness he had just absorbed swirled in his palm.
"Now, Meznia, we could do this the easy way, or the hard way. Which do you prefer?"

>"Go to Karzahni!" Meznia yelled.
Kerry made a tutting sound. "Very well. The hard way it is."

>The darkness in his hand deepened. Kerry spoke.
"If it is darkness that which you serve, it shall be darkness to where you will go. Taste oblivion!"

>Meznia's eyes widened. The darkness appeared to leave her for a moment, and she whispered, "Thank you!"
The shadow reached out for her. It seeped into every crack in her armor, impregnated every muscle and organ in her body. Soon, the darkness overloaded her body, and tried to shunt everything inside out of the way. Slowly her body was disintegrating from the inside. Pretty soon, all that was left was an empty shell that seeped darkness.

>Kerry kicked her mask away. He closed his eyes in mourning.
"I'm sorry it had to come to this," he stated, "You left me no choice."

>He turned and walked in the direction of his comrades, his new Kokra-Nui on his back.<p>

When he caught up with them, he saw that they were gathered around another fight. Dedede, Bowser, and Donkey Kong were trying to take on Drenix, and losing badly. He ran up and got between them.

>"STOP!" he yelled.
This shocked both sides so much they just froze. Kerry turned to Drenix.

>"Drenix, this charade must end," he stated, "The time has come. We are ready for an assault on the command room. Are you with us?"
Drenix looked at him. Kerry saw in his eyes he was debating the merits of his two plans of action. Then his eyes flicked to Kerry's back, where the Kokra-Nui rested. His eyes filled with rage, and he tackled Kerry, a sword at the ready.

>"Where is she?" he snarled.
Kerry sighed, "She made a choice. She chose death over the walking hell of her life."

>Drenix relented. He stood up and nodded. "I'm at your command, sir."
Kerry got up, rubbing his neck. "Alright, now, we need to get into the sanctum. Can you do this for us, Drenix?"

>Drenix nodded, "Yes, sir, I believe I can."
He walked up to the door, and put his hand on a scanner. The door whirred open.

>The group ran inside. The room was dark, with mechanical lights blinking all around. Suddenly, the door slammed shut, and the familiar laugh of Dr. Eggman resounded through the room.
"Hohohoho! So you think you can just waltz in here without an appointment? Well, the monitor isn't here!"

>Kerry stepped forward. "Show yourself, Eggman!"
The voice laughed, "Hoho, not likely. I'd much rather make you fight! Behold, your friends!"

>Two doors opened at the other end of the room. Two sets of red eyes glowed from the darkness.
Out of the shadows walked E-123 Omega and Metal Sonic 1.0. Both looked straight at the group.

>"Power Save Off. Full-Power Battle Mode On," stated Omega
"All living things kneel before your master!" added Metal.

>Kerry held his hands up, "Listen, guys, we don't want to fight you."
Omega raised his arms. Out of the wrists sprouted twin Gatling Guns. He opened fire on Kerry. The SPARTAN jumped out of the way. He landed in front of Metal.

>"Please, Metal, you must remember us..." he said, beseeching the Robian.
Metal reached down and grabbed Kerry by the neck. He lifted the man up, and lifted off the ground.

>Kerry grabbed at the fingers that were constricting his windpipe. "Metal...please..."
The Robian's eyes flashed green for a split second, and he looked down at his feet. Suddenly, his head sparked, and he promptly flung Kerry across the room. His allies ran up and looked at him. Shakily, he got up off the ground.

>"Alright," he said, gasping, "We fight. Use non-lethal force unless absolutely necessary."
The group nodded as one. Mario, Shadow, Link, and Kirby immediately attacked Metal. DK, Bowser, Wario, and Dedede went after Omega. Kerry ran after them.

>He unsheathed Kokra-Nui. When he got to Omega, he slashed. Amazingly, Omega caught the blade with one hand, and aimed at Kerry. This gave Donkey Kong just enough time to get behind Omega and let loose a Giant swiveled his head around to look at the ape.
"Pitiful simian," Omega stated, "Do you really think that is gonna hurt me?"

>A voice came from above. "No, but I'm pretty sure this will pack a whallop!"
Omega looked up. Dedede was flying above him, Bowser hanging from his feet. Bowser let go and curled into his shell. The spiked projectile hit Omega, flattening him to the ground.

>Just as Bowser was looking proud of himself, he felt himself being lifted up off the ground. Omega lifted him up and threw him toward the wall. As he searched for a new target, he saw massive gasoline emissions on his sensors. As he turned to look, he got bowled over by Wario on the Wario-Bike.
Meanwhile, Shadow was having a hard time with Metal. The Robian was quick, much faster than the Black Blur. So far, only Kirby could catch up to him, and that was just because he had succeeded in eating Metal once.

>As Shadow came up for another strike, he got punched in the stomach. As he flipped over and landed, he activated Chaos Control.
He was amazed when Metal kept coming even through the time-stop. Metal V. Max Overdrove him in the stomach, sending him flying. From behind Metal, Chaos appeared. He covered the Robian and dragged him to the ground. Metal soon regained his composure and activated his Ring Shield. The field flung Chaos off him, and straight onto Omega's head.

>Omega grabbed at his head and somehow pried the god off of him. Looking for new targets, he spotted a red-haired woman overlooking the injured Star Warrior, Meta Knight. He focused all his processing power to his limited aiming and guidance system, and locked on.
Joseph saw this and yelled, "Watch out!"

>The sudden noise startled Metal, and he looked over to the E-100 Series Robot that was his ally. As he saw him lock on, a memory came unbidden to his mind.
Metal saw NMS knock Kerry through the building named "Fred Meyers". Text scrolled before his eyes as his combat processor came up with a solution.

>ALLY: KERRY FREEMAN INCAPACITATED

>NEW DATA: NEO METAL SONIC HAS ABSORBED SILVER THE HEDGEHOG'S PSYCHOKINESIS

>NEW DATA: BUILDING "FRED MEYERS" HAS MASSIVE HOLE LEADING TOWARD ALLY: KERRY FREEMAN

>PROCESSING |

>SOLUTION: KEEP NEO METAL SONIC AWAY FROM ALLY: KERRY FREEMAN AT ALL COSTS

>With his new directive in place, he charged toward NMS. He Overdrove NMS and sent him flying.
His victory was short lived. The newer chassis teleported behind him and unleashed a vicious Psi-Wave, knocking the older flying. Before Metal could orient himself, NMS turned back toward the hole. Energy charged up, but he wasn't aimed at Kerry.

>He wanted to damage the girl!
Metal let out a scream.

>"NO!"
"NO!"

>Metal charged at Omega, knocking him to the side. The robot swiveled, trying to get a lock on Metal. Metal was too fast, and got around behind him. Ripping off the control panel casing, he shifted his hand into an uplink node and slammed it into the panel. Omega stiffened as his core processor was forcibly rebooted. His arms shifted back into hands, and he shut down. Metal leapt off his back.
The heroes surrounding him got on guard. Metal looked at each and every one of them, before uttering one word.

>"â€|Helpâ€|"
His body shuddered, and he collapsed, offline.

>Kerry ran up to him, and checked his processor. He turned to Shadow.
"We need to get him back to Tails," he stated, "He put himself into a forced shutdown, but it's on a timer. If Tails doesn't fix him soon, he will restart and go back into rampage mode."

>Shadow shrugged, "Well, nothing is keeping us here now. Might as well head out."
Mario shook his head, "What about this reality?"

>Kerry turned to him, "We have lost this reality. There is nothing tying us here now. Ethan has won his first battle."
Dedede spoke up. "But we beat these two scrap heaps."

>Snake shook his head. "No, Colonel Freeman is right. These two were just distractions, a smokescreen to keep us from where we really needed to be."
Kerry looked at the team shamefully. "In my arrogance, I focused our forces here, where there was little chance of winning, instead of on the field, where we could have won."

>He walked toward the exit. As he reached the door, he looked back at the group. "Spherus Magna was the first to fall. Please let it be the last. Let's find Joey and Natalie."
The group headed out the door, toward where Drenix said the prison keep was. Along the way, they noticed various experiments. In one tank, a floating ball of black goo followed their movements. In another, a creepy little girl stared out at them.

>Finally, they reached the keep. The room was occupied by a Keelerak, a Grunt, and a human. Kerry ran to the cells of his two compatriots and wrenched the doors open.
Joey punched him in the leg. "Took you long enough!"

>Kerry nodded, "We had distractions."
As they turned to leave, the Keelerak started roaring. Kerry looked back at the thing, and saw it was shaking its torso back and forth. Puzzled, Kerry started back for the door.

>A mournful roar sounded through the room. A large bang came from the door. And another. And another.
Suddenly, the door flew off its hinges. In walked a behemoth. It looked as though it were wearing a giant divers outfit. Red light came out of the many view ports on its spherical helmet. In place of a hand, it had a large mining drill.

>Kerry whispered to Drenix, "What is that?"
Drenix responded, "Eggie and Vexorn call it a Bouncer. But I think Ethan's nickname was more appropriate."

>The Bouncer took a step forward, spinning the drill.
"And what would that be?" Kerry asked.

>Drenix responded simply, "Big Daddy."<p>

Chapter 14
>Big Daddy<p>

The Big Daddy roared at the group. It thrust its drill forward, charging toward the group. As the team scattered, the Bouncer hit the poor Keelerak's cage. Luckily for the spider-Rahi, it managed to leap over the Bouncer. Incidentally, it landed on Joey.

>The Big Daddy removed its drill from the wall, and turned around. Kerry unsheathed Kokra-Nui and swung. The Bouncer clumsily blocked the blow with its drill, and grabbed Kerry by the throat.
It tried to kill him by crushing his windpipe, but the MJOLNIR was too strong. Realizing this, it fired up its drill and jabbed toward his chest.

>Kerry managed to grab the base of the drill, struggling to push it away. Slowly, the rapidly gyrating tip inched closer to his chest.
Joseph realized that he saw a familiar pattern in the Bouncer's melee combat. He turned and yelled to Samus, "Get Omega back online!"

>Samus asked, "Why!?"
Joseph sighed to himself, "Where have you seen this style before?"

>Samus nodded in recognition. "Got it!"
Meanwhile, Joey was having issues of his own. The Keelerak hadn't taken kindly to landing on a spiky Unggoy body, and was trying to attack the poor Grunt. Joey managed to get onto the back of the Visorak, and was riding it into walls.

>The Keelerak realized that it couldn't remove the annoying pest on its back. It changed direction and ran straight at the Big Daddy.
Samus was working feverishly to reactivate Omega. She was almost finished bypassing the security programs that Eggman had installed. She silently thanked Metal Sonic. His antivirus had weakened the programs enough that she could get through.

>"Justâ€¦|aboutâ€¦|there!"<p>

/BOOT PROGRAM INITIATED

>VIRUS PURGED

>ACTIVATING SENSORS

>WARNING!

>ENEMY UNITS DETECTED

>PRIORITIZE: PROTECTOR UNIT BOUNCER, "BIG DADDY"

>SECONDARY: VISORAK KEELERAK REBEL, "KOLORAK"

>INITIATE OFFENSIVE PROTOCOLS

Omega's eyes flashed online. The mini-mecha immediately blurred into action, changing his hand into a massive drill.

>The diminutive deathtrap slammed at full force into the Big Daddy, trying to jam his drill into the torso of the Bouncer. This distraction was enough for Kerry to leap away.
He landed in a crouch, and yelled at Drenix, "You wouldn't happen to have a Mask of Mind Control or Telepathy by any chance?"

>Drenix shook his head, "Komau and Suletu aren't my forte. But I DO have a Rau!"
Kerry cocked his head quizzically.

>Drenix sighed, "A Mask of Translationâ€¦|"
"Well, use it! Omega, back off!"

>Omega leapt away from the Bouncer. Drenix's mask warped into the form of a Great Kanohi Rau. He spoke, but the sounds that came out were that of a Bouncer.
Why are you attacking us? Asked Drenix.

>Sisterâ€¦|Where is Big Daddy's Little Sister! Came the response.
We don't know where your Little Sister is, Stated

Drenix, But I bet Eggman knows. Help us find him.

>Egg splicerâ€|knows where Little Sister is?
Most likely.

>The Bouncer roared in anger, Egg splicer stole Sister from Rapture! Told that if Big Daddy wanted to see Sister again, Big Daddy must listen to him. But Egg splicer LIE! Took Sister with him when leaving desert palace!
Drenix took a step forward and put his hand on the Bouncer's drill. We are looking for Eggman too. Maybe you could help us find him.

>The Bouncer's lights turned yellow, and it rumbled, Shiny shadow splicerâ€|want Big Daddy's help? Most splicers try to kill Big Daddy, kill Little Sister.
Drenix smiled at the Bouncer, We all lost things important to usâ€|so we help each other find those things. You lost something as well, so we want to help you. Our leader is very compassionate about this. You tried to kill him.

>The Bouncer shook, Big Daddy thought splicers were here to kill Big Daddy. Big Daddy defend self!
I understand, Big Daddy. We forgive you. Will you help us?

>The Bouncer's lights turned green, and it nodded. Yes. Big Daddy will help shiny fishdome spicer and team.
Drenix turned to Kerry. "The Big Daddy wishes to help. He wants to find his 'Little Sister', and sees us as a way to find her."

>Suddenly, a scream resounded through the room.
"HEEEEEELLLLLLLLPPPPPP MMEEEE!"

>They all turned to see Joey, riding bareback on the Keelerak, charging toward them. Big Daddy stepped forward and reached out with his hand, grabbing the pinchers of the Rahi. As the creature stopped mid-charge, Joey took his chance. Unhooking his mask, he chomped down on the armor surrounding the Rhotuka Launcher.
The Keelerak howled in pain and collapsed to the ground. It twitched a bit, and then fell still.

>Joey leapt off the Keelerak and ran behind Big Daddy's legs.
Kerry sighed, "Well, now that that's overâ€|"

>The group headed out of the cell. They picked their way through the wreckage of the base, trying their best to avoid the debris. Once they got to the entrance, they stopped in shock.
The ground was littered with bodies, not only Rahkshi and Visorak, but Matoran and Toa as well. Even some armored animal carcasses were strewn about.

>Kerry saw one such carcass shift slightly. He ran over to the injured animal. It was a large lizard, obviously water-adapted. It had a snake-like head and two powerful-looking forelegs. Its hind legs were considerably less powerful, more like vestigial stumps with toes.
The amazing part about this creature was its tail. It was thicker than the rest of the torso, and appeared to be more mechanical than organic. A single track looped around it, the only obvious locomotion other than the giant forelegs.

>Kerry called Drenix over. He asked, "Hey, what is this thing?"
Drenix covered his mouth in shock. "That's...a Tarakava!"

>Kerry was confused, "A Whoosawhatta?"
Drenix shook his head, "A Tarakava. A Water element Rahi. Apex predator of the sea. But what's one doing here?"

>"In the desert? Who knows?"
Drenix sighed, "I meant here, on Spherus Magna. I wasn't aware any Rahi had migrated from the Robot..."

>Kerry scratched the top of his helmet. "The...Robot? I keep hearing people talk about that, but I never thought it appropriate to ask..."
By now the rest of the group had caught up. Drenix explained.

>"Before the Matoran, Makuta, and Skakdi settled here, we lived in a

giant mobile biosphere known as Mata Nui. We were...how do you say it...its immune system. We lived in it for thousands of years before the Brotherhood struck. Their leader, the Makuta Teridax, overloaded the power plant for the city of Metru Nui, which was essentially the brain of Mata Nui. Mata Nui fell into a coma. One thousand years later, A team of Toa managed to resurrect Mata Nui, but unfortunately, Teridax had slipped into the control chamber under Metru Nui. When the body was reanimated, he was in control. He banished Mata Nui to this planet, then chased him down. Fortunately, Mata Nui dropped a moon on his head, allowing us to escape the robot. we colonized this planet, and now live alongside the Agori and Glatorian."

Kerry was shocked. These people had a much harder life than anyone else here. And now, due to his universe's meddling, they were forced to leave their planet.

>Before he could contemplate further, a loud cry was heard. It sounded like a mix between a roar and breaking glass. He turned.
A large scorpion jumped on him and tackled him to the ground. The creature tried to sting him, but his armor blocked the first few hits. Then his helmet started to crack. Out of his limited peripheral vision, he saw a large shape barrel toward him.

>With a whirring of his drill, Big Daddy slammed his arm into the scorpion. While not penetrating the creature's thick armor, the drill managed to send it flying. Seeing an opening, Joseph leapt toward the creature.
He slammed his full weight down on Onukra-Nui, driving the sword into the gut of the creature. It let out another roar, then fell limp.

>Kerry picked himself up off the ground, and asked Drenix, "What was that?"
Drenix replied, "Nui-Jaga. Stone Element Rahi. They're territorial, but usually leave larger beings alone. Something is wrong here..."

>"Guys," Sonic started, "We got a problem..."
Kerry turned to him, "What is it?"

>Shadow broke in, "I can't get ahold of G.U.N. or the UNSC. Communications are down."
"Are we being jammed?"

>Shadow shook his head, "No...I would still be able to get a ping back. This is as though the signal doesn't exist anymore..."
It dawned on Kerry what this might mean.

>"Shit..."<p>

15. The Queens

Chapter 15

>The Queens<p>

Kerry swung his sword at the tree, hacking a large section of the trunk off. He proceeded to use his Energy Sword to chop it into logs. He gathered the pieces of wood, and headed back to the base camp.

>The group had been camped out on the border between Bota and Bara Magna for a week now. They had managed to get the portal opened up minutely, just enough to get a quick transmission through, and evac the more combat-inexperienced group members. The UNSC promised to help get the rift back online. Two days after that, Skrall raiders and Bone Hunters, along with the Dark Hunters Prototype and Airwatcher, stormed the remnants of New Mangai, forcing the small group out of the city. Since then, they had set up a camp on the borderline between the Desert and Jungle. Aside from Rahi raids and a misunderstanding with a baterra, they were doing pretty good.
Kerry entered the camp. Immediately, the Big Daddy ran up to

him and took position behind him. The vaguely diesel-punk golem had taken to him as if he were its Gatherer, always trying to protect him.

>Kerry continued forward to the fire, and lay the logs down. Sitting around the dead fire-ring were Joseph, doing suit maintenance, Joey, who had rigged a machine to generate methane, albeit methane pulled from corpses, and was refilling his tank, and Julie, who was cleaning her MA5C.
Kerry sat down in between Joseph and Julie. He looked around at the camp. "Where are the others?"

>Joseph spoke without looking up, "Samus and Meta Knight are hunting, Shadow and Omega went on a salvage run for pieces to repair our weapons, and Drenix is stalking that one weird Keelerahk that keeps coming here."
Kerry looked over to Joey, just in time to see him gut open the stomach of a dead Brakas monkey. Seeing Julie and Joseph's reaction, he was glad he hadn't removed his helmet.

>"Godammit, you infernal reptilian bastard, what did I tell you about doing that in front of me!"
"Hey, this stench still smells better than you, Jarhead!"

>Julie stood. "What did you just say to me!?"
Kerry looked at the Bouncer, to find the golem staring at him. It let out a small moan and shook its head. It inclined its head toward the squabbling duo and let out a questioning call.

>Kerry nodded, "Break 'em up."
The Bouncer stood, and with surprising agility, positioned itself in between Julie and Joey. Its portholes glowed red.

>Seeing this, Joey backed off. Julie turned her fury on the Big Daddy, and opened her mouth to speak.
A voice sounded behind her. "You sure you want to argue with a Protector?"

>They all turned to see Drenix, with the Keelerahk strung up behind him. "They don't take kindly to violence."
Kerry stood up. "Where didja find him?"

>Drenix gestured to the Keelerahk. "This guy was following me. Claims his name is Kolorak."
"What does he want?"

>Drenix shrugged, "Visorak are group animals, and this guy was ousted from the horde. I think he wants to join us."
Drenix's Rua glowed, and everyone heard the drone of the Bouncer's voice. Big Daddy remembers this animal. Hated by all others, like Alphas. But not all Alphas bad. An Alpha saved my Sister one time, delivered her back to Big Daddy. Alpha's name was Sigma, CMP.

>Joey piped up, "Is there a point?"
Yes, rumbled the Bouncer, Maybe this bug like Sigma. Maybe it will be helpful. Maybe it can help Dome Splicer and friends find way back to his home.

>Drenix shook his head, "That's an awful lot of maybes."
Samus's voice came over the comm. "I have multiple contacts! The raiders from Mangai are attacking!"

>Kerry leapt into action, swiftly loading a magazine into his MA-5D. "C'mon, move! Cut Kolorak loose, he can prove his worth if he wants to help!"
Drenix unsheathed one of his blades and cut the ropes holding the Visorak. The creature immediately ran off.

>Kerry ran out of the camp. A beam of dark energy hit the ground. Kerry rolled to the side and looked up.
A large being floated above him. It had silver blades on its back, and carried a large staff.

>"Airwatcher," Kerry snarled.
"Ha! What is this?" Airwatcher snorted, "Another little Toa? Or one of those little meat-cans, what were they called?"

>Airwatcher's voice turned dark, "Oh yes, I remember...Marines."
Kerry didn't reply, at least not with words. A large red laser speared toward the Dark Hunter. Airwatcher barely

dodged the blast. "Ooh, touchy...you need some anger management."

>A feminine voice sounded behind him, "How about percussive maintenance?"
A dark blast spiraled toward the Hunter, and connected. Airwatcher watched in horror as dark energy crept up his body, freezing him solid. As he fell from the sky, a missile streaked toward him, shattering the dark energy that now infused his body. Airwatcher shattered into pieces.

>Kerry looked to the source of the missile and saw Samus, her Beam Cannon still smoking. She gestured toward the expanse behind her. "They've massed a group so big we can't possibly stand up to them. We need to fall back."
Kerry shook his head. "SPARTAN's never run. We finish the fight."

>"And normally I would agree with you," Samus started, "But recall, we are impossibly outnumbered. We have no reinforcements. And we aren't SPARTANs."
"That's where you are wrong," Drenix stated, walking up. "Well, not about the SPARTAN part, but we DO have reinforcements. We just gotta know where to look, and I do."

After several days march, the group arrived at the remnants of Mata Nui. Kerry looked up at the large construct.

>"Whoa..."
Drenix indicated a hole about halfway up the face of the robot. "If I'm right, what we are looking for is in there."

>Kerry looked behind the group. A dust cloud was rapidly approaching. "It would be idiotic to leave this entrance unprotected. MK, Samus, Big Daddy, stay here. Protect this face!"
They climbed up the massive incline. Once at the hole, they looked back at the base. The Skrall were almost upon the defensive group.

>"We have to hurry," Kerry stated, "Those three will get overwhelmed pretty quickly."
The team scrambled into the hole. After about 30 meters, Drenix, who was leading, hit the side wall hard.

>"Ow..."
Kerry ran up to him, and felt the feeling of being pulled to the wall. He landed hard on Drenix.

>"I'm guessing the artificial gravity is still online..."
Drenix shifted under him. "Could you please get off me? That armor isn't exactly lightweight."

>Kerry scrambled up. Pulling up his rifle, he looked at the walls of the tunnel. "These walls...they aren't natural. What created this?"
"You're about to find out," said Drenix. He dusted himself off and kept walking down the tunnel. The rest of the group followed.

>Abruptly, the thin, winding tunnel they were walking in opened up into a massive cavern. Circular patterns adorned the walls. Joseph lowered his weapon in awe.
"Where are we?"

>Drenix indicated the walls. "We are in the heart of a nest."
Kerry shook his head, "A nest? Of what?"

>Drenix kept walking. The group had no choice but to follow him, or else they would get lost.
Eventually, they came to a smaller cave. Inside sat two gigantic, almost identical monsters. The only difference between them was the coloration on their armor.

>They looked to the group, and Kerry heard a voice echo through his mind. Ah...visitors...and a Toa, no less. Are you here to imprison us, again, Toa of Embers?
Drenix shook his head, ignoring the slur. "I am not Tahu. We come asking for assistance."

>A laugh resounded through Kerry's head. And why should we help you? What do we stand to gain from you?
Drenix swept his arms around the room. "Have you even left this room? Do you know nothing of the outside world? Everyone has fled. This world is abandoned. We are

trying to reopen the gate that brought these foreigners behind me to this place. If you assist us in driving off the raiders that are trying to destroy us, we will ensure your escape from this universe."

>What use do you have for us? You should be able to handle yourself, Toa.
"We need your army, mighty Cahdok and Gahdok," Drenix started, "Even now, a force assembles to destroy our group. We are outnumbered and outclassed. We need the Bohrak Swarm."

>If we allow you to be assisted by our swarm, you promise to take us with you when you escape?
"Yes, mighty queens."

>The Bahrag looked at each other. We will assist you. Tahnok-Kal will show you out.
A canister rose from the ground. As it split down the middle, Kerry noticed a spherical red body emerge. Tahnok-Kal unrolled from his standby position, and looked at the group. All he said was, "This way, warriors."

>As Kerry turned to leave, the Bahrag spoke to him. Hold, SPARTAN.
Kerry looked at them incredulously, "How do you know what I am?"

>We know a great deal about you, Kerry Freeman. We know of your past, your present, and your hopeful future.
Kerry's grip on his MA-5D tightened. "How do you know all this?"

>All will be revealed, in time.
Kerry was incredulous. "Why did you stop me?"

>Your future, and the future of existence itself, depends on your actions in the coming months. When the Great Being composed us, we were implanted with a single purpose, to come before all else.
"And that is?"

>Cahdok looked straight into his eyes. To assist the SPARTAN Kerry Freeman, and deliver to him two messages: Though the one you seek has fallen to darkness, a flicker of light still burns in his soul. And to defeat the one who would destroy your race, you doom another.
Kerry shook his head, "No. I refuse to allow another race to die. I have already ruined these Matoran and Agori's lives. I will not ruin another."

>We hope you can keep your promise, but, how do you say it? The die has been cast. You have started a sequence of events with your beheading of Ethan, that, like dominos, will cascade into an inevitable conclusion.
Kerry pulled up his rifle, "I will not allow this foretelling to come to life!"

>The Bahrag laughed, Your future is our past, human. Now go, and make good use of our Swarms.
Kerry opened his mouth to speak, but was cut off by a Southern accent on his comm.

>"Son of a bitch! Meta Knight is down!"
Another voice chimed in, "How the hell did Kig-Yar get here!?" A beam rifle shot echoed in the background. "Goddammit, Samus! Get your head down. Let the Bohrak take them!"

>Kerry swore to himself, "Damn it! Jackals!"
He turned to the Queens. "I'll come back for you!"

>The Queens just looked at him. As Kerry ran out the door, a symbol caught his eye. He rubbed the dust off of it.
"...The hell?"

>It was the Forerunner symbol for Reclaimer.<p>

16. An Unexpected Loss

Chapter 16

>An Unexpected Loss<p>

Kerry emerged into the sunlight. Before him lay a desolate battlefield. Most of the Skrall and Bohrak were destroyed. He spotted

his team and Tahnok-Kal hiding behind a barricade made out of the dead carapaces of fallen Bohrak. He sprinted toward them.

>Right as he got to the group, a purple beam flashed right in front of him. He dove forward as another one hit the ground right behind him. He huddled up behind the barricade.
He turned to Joseph.

"What the hell happened?"

>Joseph shrugged. "We aren't really sure. We were fighting the the Skrall, and a rift opened up on that mesa. A bunch of Jackals came out, and the rest is history."
Suddenly, the Bohrak shell nearest Kerry disintegrated into orange pixels. He scurried away quickly.

>Joseph nodded, "Yeah, they can do that now, evidently..."
Kerry looked around. "Where is that one guy? Tahnok-Kal?"

>Julie unslung something from her back. It was a golden, mask-like organic being. "Here he is."
Kerry cocked his head. "I thought he was bigger."

>"This is his krana-kal," stated Drenix.
"His what?"

>Drenix sighed, "You know, I shouldn't even be surprised that you don't know what that is..."
"Just tell me, asshole."

>"It's basically his brain."
Kerry felt his lunch come up. "Why did you tell me, asshole?"

>Drenix sighed and shook his head, "I can't win with you, can I?"
A new sound joined the cacophony of noise raining down on them. It was familiar, but boded ill for the group.

>It was a bullet ping. Seconds behind the ping, Kerry heard the familiar sound of a sniper rifle. The Jackals had human weapons.
"OK," Kerry muttered to himself, "Time to even the field..."

>He turned to Joseph, and yelled, "Sniper crossfire! Now!"
The two grabbed their sniper rifles and rolled from cover. Kerry's VISR painted the targets in his scope bright red. He fired once, twice, three times. Three Jackals fell with holes in their skulls.

>Suddenly, a large silver being appeared from nowhere and knocked Kerry to the ground. His VISR painted it blue, unknown.
The thing's helmet opened, and a humanoid skull made out of orange plasma screeched at him. That was all it had time to do, as a sniper round tore straight through the side of its head.

>Kerry shoved the limp metal corpse off of him and dove back behind cover. He looked over, and Joseph gave him a thumbs up.
Kerry shook his head in annoyance. "What was that?"

>"If I'm right, and I probably am," started Drenix, "Those are Toa-killers. The Marendar."
Julie ducked back behind cover.

"Explain, then, how they have human skulls!"

>"All I know is that they are made from the remains of the Great Beings' enemies."
Kerry sighed, "This place just gets better and better..."

>The battle raged like this for a while, with the silver warriors charging the group while they tried their damndest to survive. Eventually, twin Tahnok-Va scuttled up, pushing a large red-and-silver ball.
Kerry turned to Drenix, "Is that...?"

>Drenix nodded, "A new body for Tahnok-Kal, yes."
Kerry leaned out from cover to fire a burst at a dog-like warrior that had gotten too close. "I was gonna say cannonball, but that works too!"

>Drenix simply sighed.
A voice came over the comm. "ALPHA Squad, this is Captain Thomas Lasky of the UNSC Infinity. The rift gate is open! What is your location?"

>Kerry hit the reply key in his helmet, "Pinned down about 40 klicks west of rift location! We have Jackals and an unidentified alien

life-form! It looks mechanical! Local intel labels it as a 'Marendar'. Uploading bio-scan."
There was a pause on the other end. Eventually, Lasky came back.

>"We've encountered these creatures too. They're a Forerunner creation, called Promethean Knights. Hold on, we will send a Pelican to evac you!"
A question popped into Kerry's mind: How did a Forerunner construct get onto Spherus Magna, and how did Drenix, who had only been on the planet a year, already have a name for it? He pushed these questions to the back of his mind and turned to the remaining members. "OK, they're sending a Pelican out for us. We need to hold out here until evac arrives."

>"What about the queens?" asked Tahnok-Kal.
Kerry thought for a moment. "A Pelican isn't big enough to carry Cahdok and Gahdok. But I don't want to break my promise..."

>A miniscule Tahnok-Va scuttled forward. Tahnok-Kal cocked his head toward it and listened. He turned to Kerry. "They say they have completed their duty. They will wait here, and hold the Mata Nui Robot. They say do not take too long."
"Will you be staying, too?" asked Kerry.

>Tahnok-Kal's lower jaws tilted inward, as if smiling. "Are you kidding? This is the most fun I've had since the Toa Nuva!"
Kerry nodded, laughing. Then he noticed something.

>"Hey, has anyone seen the Bouncer?"
Screeches of terror sounded from over where the Kig-Yar snipers were laid out, followed by the sound of a diesel-powered drill.

>"Never mind."
Kerry turned to Julie, who was tending to the wounds of Meta Knight. A bullet wound was plainly shown straight through his stomach. Kerry touched his shoulder.

>"Evac is coming. Don't worry..."
Meta Knight coughed, blood spurting from under his mask. His mask was covered in dried blood. Kerry looked at Julie, "Why haven't you removed his mask?"

>"Something about honoring his forefathers."
Kerry sighed, "A warrior is the hardest to change."

>A large crash sounded behind the cadaverous barricade. Kerry peeked around and saw the Bouncer, backed up, trying to fight off three Marendar. Kerry pulled out his Battle Rifle and fired three bursts, hitting each Knight in the neck, severing the essential connections to the rest of their bodies.
Kerry yelled at the Daddy, "Get back around here, you gigantic palooka! You can't find your Sister if you're dead!"

>The Bouncer leapt over the barricade and hunkered down.
The familiar whine of a Pelican's engines echoed across the battlefield. Kerry looked over the barricade and saw a new model flying towards them. It lowered itself almost to the ground, and the bay doors opened. A female SPARTAN leaned out.

>"Come on, Colonel! Get your team on here!"
Kerry helped the remaining ALPHA squad team get onto the Pelican. As he was helping Shadow into the bay, a Marendar jumped onto the cockpit and started trying to break through.

>"God dang it!" Kerry yelled.
The pilot shouted back at them, "We can't take off with those guys focused on us!"

>Kerry made to leap out of the Pelican, ready to take on the Prometheans. A small hand on his knee stopped him. He looked down.
Meta Knight was looking up at him through his red-tinted mask. A hand covered the large sniper wound in his belly, and the other was firmly gripped on Galaxia. He spoke, "Allow me."

>Kerry was stunned, "You're in no condition to fight. Why?"
Meta Knight sighed, and coughed up more blood. "I am not long for this existence. I would rather die helping my comrades than pass on a

bed."

>He reached up, and took off his mask. Kerry gasped at what was underneath.
Meta Knight's real face looked exactly like Kirby's. He coughed again, and handed Kerry the mask. "Make sure Kirby gets this. I wanted to pass it to him, when the time was right, but that point is moot. Can you do this?"

>Kerry choked back a sob, and nodded, "It would be an honor, Star Warrior."
"Now," Meta Knight stated, looking out the window, "They call these Knights 'warrior-killers'? I will have to test this title."

>He leapt out of the Pelican, and proceeded to whirl at high speed. The normally golden Mach Tornado was tinted red with the warrior's blood. He took out three Marender, which got the attention of the horde. All the Prometheans in range focused on him, and withdrew from the Pelican. Kerry looked out the back one last time, and then settled into his seat. The Pelican lifted off, and they were away.<p>

17. A New Mission

A New Mission

The Pelican flew through the Rift, entering into a massive hangar that looked too big to be in a ship. The mood on the D77 was somber, the various members of ALPHA mourning the loss of their esteemed comrade. Meta Knight's mask hung from Kerry's hip.

>The Pelican landed in the hangar. As the lift opened, Kerry saw all who were there waiting for them. Sonic, MS, and Emerl stood to one side, Bowser, Mario, and Luigi to the other. Kerry choked up when he saw the diminutive Kirby, standing next to what appeared to be "Captain" DeDeDe. But none of these people, as much as he had missed them, caught his attention quite as much as the person standing behind them.
That green armor was unforgettable, the massive chest scar undeniable. Here was a man, a friend Kerry had thought long dead. Here was the hero of the UNSC, and in fact, the savior of HaloEarth. Here was John-117, the Master Chief.

>Kerry stopped staring at the Chief when he heard a soft "poyo". He looked down and saw Kirby looking at the mask on his hip.
Kerry knelt down and unclipped the mask. Kirby struggled to make words. "Meta...Knight?"

>Kerry removed his helmet and smiled softly. "Meta Knight couldn't make it, Kirby. He asked me to make sure you got this. He wanted you to have it."
Kerry wiped the blood off the mask and handed it to Kirby. He let out another "poyo", and walked off, contemplating the mask. As Kerry followed Commander Palmer to the bridge, he was waylaid by DeDeDe.

>"Listen, Kerry," stated DeDeDe under his breath, "I happen to know that Meta Knight would only part with that mask if it was either taken by force, or if he died, and I don't think you would steal it. What happened?"
Kerry sighed. "Sit in on the debriefing. I'm not quite ready to talk about it right now..."

>DeDeDe was about to retort, but then he noticed a shine on his face. Kerry was tearing up. DeDeDe closed his beak and nodded, "Yes, sir."<p>

Kerry walked into the briefing room. The rest of the squad was already assembled. He stood at attention, and faced their debriefing officer.

>He got right to it. "Tell us about your mission on Spherus Magna,

Colonel Freeman."

>Kerry nodded, "Yes, sir. We were sent in because ONI said that Sierra-325, otherwise known as Ethan, was active there. We helped the local government in a counter-offensive against Ethan's troops, and my team entered into his base. While inside, we discovered that Ethan had been rift-jumping and stealing different universes heroes. We released the heroes, but by the time we reached the sanctum, he had left."

>The interrogator crossed his arms, "And these new faces?"

>"Field recruits, sir. They proved themselves capable in battle, and we let them stay."

>The interrogator nodded. "I recognize the red one as a Spherus Magnan, but what about that one with the divers helmet?"

>"That would be a Big Daddy, sir. A Bouncer, to be precise. He says he is from somewhere called Rapture."

>The color drained from the interrogators face. This did not go unnoticed to Kerry.

>"Pardon my asking, sir, but do you know something we should?"

>The interrogator shook his head, "Nothing relevant, not yet. Any casualties on the mission?"

>Kerry hung his head, "Yes, sir. Meta Knight. He took an enemy sniper round to the stomach. A human sniper round, from a Kig-Yar sniper."

>The interrogator sighed. "Tell me about these 'Marendar'."

>Drenix stepped forward, "I can answer this. The Marendar were machines created by the Great Beings to hunt Toa in case we ever got too powermad and tried to take over. I don't know why they were released, but I think it has something to do with our battle with the Skrall."

>The interrogator nodded. "Noted. And for future reference, Toa, when a superior officer addresses you, you respond with 'Yes, Sir' or 'No, Sir'."

>"I'll keep that in mind next time I see a superior officer."

>The interrogator leaned forward, "I am your superior."

>Drenix stated, "How old are you?"

>Taken aback, the interrogator replied, "57. Why?"

>"That means the most combat experience you could have had is about forty years. I have been in combat for over five hundred. Once I meet a man with more combat experience than that, or someone who has earned my respect as a courageous and smart commander, I will call him 'sir'."

>"I don't know what's gotten into you, Toa," growled the interrogator, "But you better figure the difference between your allies and your enemies."

>Drenix nodded, "Duly noted."

>Kerry stepped forward, "Sir, if what Commander Palmer told me is true, we have been stuck on Spherus Magna for four years. I was wondering if you could bring us up to speed on events."

>The interrogator nodded in agreement, "Yes, yes, I think you have earned that much."

>He called up a holo-projection. As images flashed on the screen, he narrated.

>"Not too long after you left, we held a memorial for the fallen heroes of the war. The Arbiter was present at this ceremony. His people found out about him accepting an invitation from a human, And started a revolt. This Sangheili Civil War was relatively short. The anti-Arbiter faction, the Servants of the Abiding Truth, launched an all out assault on the Arbiter. During the civil war, we managed to capture a Sangheili leader, the kaidon Jul 'Mdama. We kept him imprisoned at Trevelyan Station."

>"Excuse me," Kerry interrupted, "What is Trevelyan Station?"

>"You would have known it by its former name, Onyx. 'Mdama managed to use Forerunner relics to teleport himself to a Sangheili colony. There, he enlisted the locals into his personal militia, which he named the

Covenant Remnant. He discovered the location of the Forerunner shield world Requiem, and spent three years trying to open it. As it turns out, one half of the UNSC Forward Unto Dawn, the half with the Master Chief, had been slowly drifting toward the planet after the Battle of the Ark. The planet scanned the Chief, and he was reawakened by Cortana. As the Dawn was drawn into the gravity field of the planet, the Chief successfully destroyed three Sangheili warships, crippling the Covenant presence. Once on the ground, he did something that nearly doomed us all."

>Shadow huffed, "And what would that be?"
"He awakened a Forerunner."

>Kerry almost leapt in shock, "A Forerunner!? Aren't they extinct?"
"So we thought," The interrogator said sadly, "But this Forerunner was anything but the benevolent ancestors we thought they were. This Forerunner had a deep-seated hatred for humanity. He brought down the UNSC Infinity, reactivated his warship, and slipped to Halo Installation 03, and the research facility Ivanoff Station. There, he removed a powerful artifact, known as the Composer, and used it to transform all the humans on the station, except the Chief, who had snuck on, into data to power his Promethean Sentinels."

>"And those Sentinels," Kerry started, remembering the symbol on Spherus Magna, "Those were the same as the Marendar we fought, right?"
"The same. After this, he slipped his warship to Earth, intending to wipe out the humans. The Chief gave chase in a Broadsword, and ended up inside the ship. Here, he confronted the Forerunner, and threw him into the Composer. The ship disintegrated around him, but we managed to pick him up from the debris."

>Kerry was shocked, "What was the casualty rate?"
"The population of Ivanoff Station, New Phoenix, countless Marines, and some civilian equipment."

>"Wow..." Kerry said to himself. "We sure missed a lot..."
"Yes, you did," the interrogator said, "And i'm sorry we have to send you on another mission so soon."

>Kerry shook his head, "Already? We just got back!"
"You are the only team qualified for this."

>Kerry's shoulders sagged, "Fine, sir."
"Alright, then. As your recon on Spherus Magna has indicated, it is possible that in addition to moving through reality, the rift gate is also capable of moving through time, as well. A recent survey in the North-Atlantic Ocean has revealed what may be the ancient remnants of an Egg Pawn factory. Dating puts the last operational usage of this facility at 1972, Earth time. Your team will be sent through the rift to recon and destroy this facility. Any questions?"

>Shadow raised his hand, "Just one, sir. Why would Eggman build a factory floating in the ocean in 1972?"
"Well," the interrogator chuckled, "It's not floating. He built his factory into an existing complex resting on the ocean floor. And we believe the time period was chosen as a sanctuary so he could get an army out without interference."

>Kerry stepped forward, "Sir, will we have a map of the facility?"
The interrogator smiled, "No. I believe you already have a guide."

>He looked at Big Daddy.
Something clicked in Kerry's head. "Wait, you don't mean-"

>"That's right, Colonel," the interrogator nodded, "You will be going to the underwater city of Rapture."
Kerry looked at Big Daddy, and he swore he saw the metal behemoth shudder in excitement.

18. Rapture

Rapture

Kerry walked back and forth in front of the team he had assembled. He handpicked each member based on how he thought they would be helpful in an urban environment.

>Joseph, because he was a veteran of block-based urban special ops. Metal Sonic, due to his ability to scan through water and steel. Sonic, on account of his speed. Drenix, as his heat abilities may prove invaluable in an environment that was permanently on the bottom of a frozen ocean. And Big Daddy, for his extensive knowledge of the city.
Kerry did one more look over his team, and nodded. He turned to the tech in charge of the rift.

>"We are ready."
The tech indicated his understanding, and the empty portal in front of them flared to life. It was a brighter hue of the color used to identify HaloEarth.

>"Alright, team," Kerry snapped, "Move!"
They charged through the portal. As soon as they stepped through, the ground was gone. Having prepared for the massive drop, Kerry grabbed on to Sonic and tucked into a ball. He locked his armor.

>Faster and faster the great blue expanse grew, until finally, he landed with a loud splash. The buoyancy counters in his new GEN2 armor activated, and he floated to the surface. Kerry rolled onto his back and unlocked his armor.
Sonic sat on his chest, shaking the salt-water out of his fur. He shivered and looked around. Nothing but water.

>He looked down at Kerry, "I guess now would be a bad time to mention I can't swim, huh?"
Kerry sighed. "Hang on, I'm gonna roll over."

>He flipped onto his front, and with Sonic now straddling his back, proceeded to swim to the giant lighthouse that jutted out of the horizon.
When he got there, he dragged himself onto the rocky dock. The rest of the team were already there. Kerry stood up and looked at his team.

>"Does everyone know the objective?"
His team nodded, "Sir, yes sir!"

>"Alright. I will split us into two teams. Most of us will be heading directly toward the manufacturing plant. Joseph and Drenix will be on their own, searching for the Bouncer's Little Sister."
Kerry turned to Joseph, "If you see anything of interest, inform me. We need to know if you find anything that would compromise our mission. Try to stay out of combat, and keep hidden. The less the enemy knows of us, the better."

>Joseph and Drenix saluted, and headed to the bathysphere. The small air sphere sped along its way toward the city.
While he was waiting for it to come back, Kerry stared at the large brass statue supported over the walkway. It was a man holding a banner, which read, "No gods or kings, only man." Kerry sighed inwardly. The statue was of the late Andrew Ryan, who ran the city.

>"This guy is more self-absorbed than Meta Knight," he said to himself, then immediately shut the thought from his mind. The wound was still too fresh for jokes.
In a moment of sudden randomness, he found himself wondering what happened to the Halberd. Meta Knight had mentioned the ship on a few occasions. Kerry assumed it would just go to Kirby.

>The sound of the bathysphere docking shook him from his morbid thoughts. He had a mission, and being distracted by dead allies would inevitably get him killed. He would always remember the sacrifice, and would pray for the Star Warrior's soul until the day he

died.
"Alright, men!" he stated loudly, "Pile into the giant ball!"

>Sonic chuckled at the ridiculous comment, and Metal made a sound that could almost have been amusement. Only Big Daddy didn't make a noise, instead looking at Kerry, his portholes glowing blue.
Kerry knew this giant pile of metal knew what he was going through. Kerry had only ever lost three people in the field, and of those three he had personally dispatched one. But somehow, this one being, whom he had only known a week, was affecting him far more than three of his closest friends. Maybe it was that Meta Knight had people, like Kirby and DeDeDe, who were waiting for him. Tyrel and Kevin were alone, and it somehow lessened the burden.

>Kerry would never admit it to anyone, but seeing Kirby in that hangar, solemnly holding Meta Knight's mask, had almost made him break down. The kid had no one now, as DeDeDe was a member of the UNSC. No one to help him with the understanding that his mentor would never again be there to help him get up when he fell, to laugh with him when DeDeDe hurt himself inanely, or teach him the code of a Star Warrior.
Kerry made a promise to himself, that instant, that he would go back to Spherus Magna, get Meta Knight's body, and give the old warrior a proper burial. Then he would continue the training Meta Knight had started, teaching Kirby how to be a powerful warrior. He owed them both that much.

>The bathysphere shuddered to a halt, and opened. Kerry shook his head and stepped out, MA5D raised. Splicers, citizens who hyped on the gene-altering plasmids and the chemical EVE, might still be roaming the city, even after the leaders were gone. Other than a decaying human corpse floating in the water by the dock, the area was clear.
Kerry motioned to the rest of the team. They moved in formation, with Sonic at the middle due to his exposure. He looked around.

>This city sure had seen better days. Water leaked everywhere. Dead Splicers littered the ground around them. The Big Daddy groaned, and Kerry's helmet translated it into an explanation. "Jack Ryan did this. He was the liberator of Rapture. He killed Ryan and Atlas."
Sonic shivered, "It's cold down here."

>"It's the depth," Kerry explained, "I would bet the heating systems probably haven't worked in years."
He pulled up short in one of the doorways. "Fuck..."

>The glass wall had shattered. A large plane body rested halfway through the tube. It looked as though they could possibly walk through it, but Kerry really didn't want to risk it. He looked to Big Daddy.
"Again, Jack Ryan," rumbled the Bouncer, "The large metal bee he came here on crashed through the tube. It is the only way to the next bathysphere."

>"Fine."<p>

"Have I ever mentioned how much I hate water?"

>"Unfortunately, Drenix, I will never forget it."
The two warriors were sneaking through the Medical Pavilion. So far, they had succeeded in avoiding the enemies scattered throughout the area. Splicers roamed free, but also present were a few Unggoy Minors and what looked like ancient rotting warriors.

>"We've cleared this place," Drenix pleaded, "Can we please leave?"
Joseph sighed, "Yes, we can leave."

>The two slowly made their way back to their bathysphere. As they approached, a group of undead warriors stood watch. They were clad in what looked like ancient Greek battle armor. One of them, more armored than the rest, barked orders to the smaller ones.
"Someone has been through here! We must find them! Or the God of War will

curse our souls to Tartarus!"

>"But, Captain," one of the smaller ones said, "How do we know we have been infiltrated?"
The leader smacked the smaller one in the head, knocking said extremity off of its body. "Idiot! I heard the bathysphere dock! Now search! They cannot have gotten far!"

>Drenix pulled out his swords and walked forward. "Screw secrecy," he said over his shoulder, "I'm gonna have some fun!"
His motion did not go unnoticed by the legionnaires, who turned to him. "My Lord Kra-!" The things dead eyes narrowed as it saw that the warrior with the twin chained blades was not, in fact, it's master. "Wait! You are not the God of-!"

>It's shout was cut short by the flaming blade cutting through its torso. As the blade looped back toward his hand, Drenix let out a bit of slack on his other sword and wrapped it around another's neck. Swinging his powerful arms, he flung the undead legionnaire into its allies. He then proceeded to use his power over fire to burn them, reducing the soldiers into smoking cinders.
He stood, panting, and sheathed his blades. He looked back at Joseph, and tilted his head. "C'mon. We don't have all day!"

>Joseph shook his head and followed. He stepped into the bathysphere and looked at the display.
"Let's check out Fort Frolic. It sounds sane."

"Damn it!"

>The security 'bot fired another burst at Kerry. While the surprisingly high-tech drone's bullets were not enough to break through his shields, it was still enough to kill an unarmored hedgehog. Kerry was busy making himself noticeable so the damned thing wouldn't target Sonic.
Said azure mammal was riding on the back of Big Daddy, who was protecting the little animal as if he were its Little Sister. It groaned menacingly at the 'bot, but the mechanical security drone was insufficiently programmed to know the implications of such a vocalization.

>Kerry finally got fed up with the insolent combat droid, and pulled out Kokra-Nui. Leaping into the air, he swung violently. He landed on the ground, the two halves of the drone falling with him.
An annoying beeping caught his attention. He stood and turned toward the sound. From a vent in the wall, three more sentry turrets flew toward him.

>Kerry clenched his teeth. At this rate, they would never reach the bathysphere. He adopted a combat stance, ready to take out the seemingly infinite supply of drones.
One of the drones opened fire on him. Quicker than the eye could see, Kerry raised his hand and transferred full shield strength to his palm. The bullets spanged off his hand, some reflecting into the ground, some right back at the drone. Some flew off into other, less predictable directions.

>That one of these directions happened to intersect with the area the Big Daddy occupied was pure coincidence. As the bullet pinged off of the Bouncer's armor, its eyes shifted from the wary yellow to enraged red. The mechanical golem rocketed toward the group of drones faster than its size would indicate was possible. The drones rudimentary threat AI recognized the danger an enraged Bouncer presented, and scattered. Unable to stop it's considerable momentum, the golem's large drill plowed straight into the turret dispenser. It stuck there.
As the Bouncer tugged on its arm, Kerry charged toward the now scattered drones, who were focusing on the newly-acquired target of Metal Sonic. He leapt onto the closest turret, dragged it to the ground, and tore off it's propeller. Using the new-found weapon as a shuriken, he gauged the proper arc and angle for his throw. He let the blade loose, sending it flying into the nearest drone. From

there, it ricocheted into the next drone, effectively destroying both offending machines.

>The Bouncer finally managed to pull its drill free from the wall. As the drill left the wall, a large portion of the dispenser came with it, effectively disabling the turret production for this area.
Kerry looked around the area. The fight had taken them right up to one of the Securis airlock doors. Looking at the sign, he noted that it lead to the Medical Pavilion, and to the bathysphere. Knowing Drenix and Joseph had gone before them, he wondered how they were holding up.

Drenix dodged backwards. A split-second later, a fish-gutting knife cut the air where he had been. Somersaulting backwards, the plaster splicer instead took a swipe at Joseph. The swipe never made contact, as Onukra-Nui neatly bisected the unfortunate junkie.

>Joseph swung the large blade onto his shoulder, and sighed. Drenix looked at him, irritated. "Sounds sane? Isn't that what you said?"
Joseph held up a hand in defense, "Hey, how was I supposed to-

>Drenix cut him off angrily, "Fucking. Homicidal. Statues. I didn't sign up for this."
"You didn't sign up at all," Joseph pointed out, "You kind of just volunteered."

>Drenix thought this over, clearly feeling verbally outmaneuvered. Finally, he gave up and sighed, "You know what I mean."
Joseph was looking intently in the other direction. Irritated, Drenix waved a hand in front of his visor. "Hey, you listening to me?"

>Joseph held up a single fist. It was the sign for hold position. Pulling his Brute Shot from his back, and holding it like a rifle, he walked forward. Drenix called after him.
"Hey, where are you-

>Joseph cut him off, "You hear that?"
As Drenix quieted down, he did in fact hear something. A low moaning. At first, he thought it was a whale. Then he realized, the noise was coming from inside the city, somewhere around them. He whispered to Joseph, who had stuck his head around the wall, "Is that a Big Daddy?"

>Joseph nodded, "An Elite Bouncer, and-"
A sound cut him off. "C'mon, Mr. Bubbles, time to find some angels!

>It was the sound of a little girl, with an undertone of something...else. The realization hit Drenix like a bag of bricks. He whispered to Joseph, "Is that her?"
Joseph shrugged, "She looks different than the others. More...I hesitate to say cute...maybe...human?"

>Sure enough, around the corner came skipping a Little Sister, followed closely by her Big Daddy. She stopped in front of Joseph, and cocked her head, confused. "You're not a angel, but you're not Mr. B, either. What are you?"
Joseph got on the comm. "Kerry? This is Joseph. We think we found her. We are in Fort Frolic."

>Kerry's voice crackled over the comm. "Good job. We'll be there soon. Out."<p>

The team flooded out of the bathysphere. As they entered the main pavilion, the Little Sister looked up at them from the splicer she was harvesting. "Look, Mr. B, more half-angels! And..."

>She gasped when she looked at the Bouncer. "Daddy? Is that you?"
The Big Daddy's eyes glowed blue, and he rumbled happily. It translated, "Yes, it's me. And I will never leave you again!"

>The Elite Bouncer went red and pushed the Little Sister behind him. It rumbled at the Sister, "That is not your Daddy, little one. I am your Daddy."
Now the Bouncer went red, "Don't listen to him, Mia! He is trying to keep us apart!"

>The Elite Bouncer made a sound similar to a laugh, "So, you are reduced to this. The great Subject Theta, the first of the Bouncers, groveling to a Little Sister!"
Kerry looked at his team, as if to say, "Theta?"

>Theta revved his drill. "I'm going to kill you!"
The Elite Bouncer responded with a charge, moving faster than even the enhanced reflexes of a Spartan-IV could track. Fortunately, Theta could, getting his drill up in time to block the tackle. Kerry swooped in quickly and grabbed the Little Sister, plopping her on his shoulders.

>Getting a grip on the Elite's drill, Theta slammed his own drill into the ground and performing his namesake attack. With the Elite off balance, Theta jammed his drill into the "superior" Big Daddy's chest.
Quickly backing away from the assault, the Elite responded with an unusual attack. Raising its left hand, a jet of flame burst from its palm and covered Theta. Theta went to his knees, unable to withstand the immense heat. Kerry imagined that Theta's innards were melting from the heat.

>The Elite took a step forward, unleashing a blast of air that knocked Theta flying.
Advancing menacingly, fire crackling around both its drill and hand, the Elite rumbled in triumph. As it took another step forward, it flickered, revealing for a split second a giant, humanoid being of multiple colors. Then it was gone.

>As the Elite raised its flaming drill for a kill strike, Drenix dove in front of Theta and held out his arms. The Elite took a step back, bewildered.
"Move, Toa," it rumbled, "This is a fight between us two Bouncers."

>Drenix stood adamant. "But you aren't a Bouncer, are you?"
That caught the Elite off guard. "What makes you think that?"

>"First," Drenix started, "Big Daddies don't flicker, not like that. And second, most of my closest friends can't even recognize me as a Toa. How could a simple minded golem do so? I'm betting you're not even human."
The Elite was speechless. Drenix pressed the verbal assault. "In fact, I'm betting you aren't even from this timeline. You're from mine, aren't you. Not a Toa, or Makuta. Rahi, maybe?"

>A light went off in his head, "Ah, how did I miss it? How many years has it been, 250, 300?"
The Elite was silent. Now Drenix scowled, "Hey, I'm talking to you, Krahka!"

>Now the Elite responded. "Very good, Toa. You figured it out."
The Elite's form shifted, melting into itself and changing color until all that remained was what looked like six Toa fused together. The new entity smiled. "It's good to see you, Drenix."

>Drenix lowered his arms and smiled back, "Likewise, Krahka."
Theta took this time to charge past Drenix. Still enraged, the Bouncer dove straight at the Rahi shapeshifter. Just before the drill connected, Kerry jumped on top of him, his massive weight pinning the golem down.

>"Why were you attacking Theta," asked Kerry, "And why did you have his Sister? Answer quickly, Rahi, or I might just find Theta a bit stronger than anticipated."
Krahka sighed, "I stole her from Eggman and that ridiculously eloquent Spartan of his."

>"Why did you steal her?"
Krahka looked at the Little Sister, and gave her a soft grin. "They were performing experiments on her, trying to see if they could find a way to exploit her bond with Theta to their advantage. I rescued her and kept her safe until her proper daddy showed up."

>Kerry pressed the query, "So, why did you assault Theta?"
Now Krahka laughed. "What, did you think i was just going to hand her

over? I had to make sure that Theta could take care of her, and do anything to save her."

>"And?"
Krahka smirked, "He passed."

>Theta was now groaning incomprehensibly. The portholes on his helmet glowed yellow. Kerry got up off him and let him embrace his Little Sister. An unusual feeling of contentment filled him as he watched the Little Sister climb up onto Theta's back, laughing. It was soon replaced with a need for confirmation.
"You said Eggman had a SPARTAN with him, correct?"

>Krahka nodded, "Yes. Pale fellow, but armed and armored to the teeth. Big, too. Might even be bigger than you. He might be even more of a problem than Eggman."
Kerry nodded, "I'll keep that in mind."

>Unslinging his rifle, he turned to his team. "Alright men, girl, Rahi. Stick to the original plan. Drenix, take Krahka with you and Joseph, and keep searching through the city. The rest of you, with me!"<p>

In a dark area in the slums sector called Pauper's Drop, a lone Egg Pawn scurried toward its destination. Its master did not like to be kept waiting, and unlike the doctor who employed him, he enjoyed slaughter.

>Sidestepping a clique of Unggoy, the miserable Pawn scrambled through the doorway to the throne room. It approached the lizard skin throne, its surface cut from a long dead sea monster. The Pawn knelt in front of the throne's occupant.
"My lord, they have separated. Three of them are seeking you out, while the rest leave for Hephaestus."

>An armored hand reached out from the darkness. The Egg Pawn flinched, awaiting the imminent demise that bad news always brought. Instead, it felt a hand pat its head. Its master spoke.
"Well done. Make preparations. We must welcome our guests."

>The Egg Pawn stuttered. "But, sir-"
The throne's occupant stood. The Pawn scurried back as he stepped off the throne's dais and into the light. The light reflected off of his pale skin, and made the red tattoo covering his face shine like blood.

>"It is time these SPARTANS met the Ghost of Sparta."<p>

19. The End

Drenix and Joseph wandered through the slums area known as Pauper's Drop. This had been the fifth area they had visited, in hopes of finding this pale SPARTAN. The legions of the undead had been eerily absent from this locale. This was as good of a sign as any that someone lived here.

>A familiar screech caught them off guard. Turning, Joseph fired upon the Suicide Unggoy who charged him. The assaulting Grunt dropped, its plasma grenades detonating harmlessly.
Drenix sighed. "Little guys. Why do they send themselves to death?"

>"I don't know." Joseph shuddered, "But they creep me the fuck out."
"You get along well with Joey," Drenix shot back, scanning the room for organic heat.

>"Well," Joseph stated, hanging back, "He's different."
Drenix held up a hand to stop him from talking. "Wait. I think someone's here."

>A low chuckle emanated from an alleyway nearby. Drenix whirled, flame swords raised. "Who's there?" he called.
There was a rattling of chains and a flash of dark red flame, as a chained blade flew from the alley. Sidestepping the blade, Drenix loosed the chains

on his own swords. There was a shifting in the darkness of the alley, and its occupant stepped into the light.

>He wore bronze-and-onyx armor, decorated on the shoulders with the sigil of a ram. The armor on his right arm was stripped away, showing the warrior's ash-white skin, and a golden, three-piece armlet was in its place. A similar, but different, sigil was on this armor. His head was uncovered, revealing a pure-white face with a red tattoo covering the left side.
On his back rested twin blades very similar in design to Drenix's fire swords. A chain wrapped each of his arms, presumably the same chain that held the blade that missed Drenix. And he was big, dwarfing even Joseph. The warrior scowled down at them.

>"I thought the mortals who gave the Doctor so much trouble would be a little more impressive," he sneered.
Joseph whispered to Drenix. "That's not a SPARTAN. Krahka lied to us."

>The large warrior overheard him. "The shifting bitch was right. I am a Spartan. Surely, you must have heard of me."
Joseph shook his head. "No, you're too low-tech to be a SPARTAN-II..."

>He trailed off, the gears in his head turning. Unseen to the warrior, his face went pale.
The warrior laughed. "Ha! No, I am not a 'Spartan Two'. I am the Ghost of Sparta! All that is left of Greece! I am the God of War!"

>Drenix scratched the top of his mask. "The Greek God of War? Ares?"
The warrior roared in anger. "Ares couldn't tell his head from his ass if he was handed a map, and the rest of the treacherous gods were little better! I am the true God of War, the Godslayer, Kratos!"

>Joseph cocked his head, "Never heard of you."
Kratos drew his blades and crouched low, like an animal. He snarled. "If you live, you will never forget me."

>He flung one of his blades toward Joseph. He shut his eyes and waited for the inevitable pain. It never came. Joseph opened his eyes warily.
Drenix stood in front of him, a blade embedded in his arm. He looked back at Joseph.

>"I can handle this guy for now! Help the others!"
"But look at the size of him!"

>Drenix smiled. "Fought bigger."
He tugged on the chain, pulling his all his might. He even added his Kanohi Pakari's power to the mix.

>Little by little, Kratos was dragged forward. Using his other blade, he anchored himself against Drenix's pull. The chains creaked and groaned, but stayed solid. Drenix put more power into it, pulling with every ounce of strength he could coax, from both body and mask. He heard both his and Kratos's bones start to crack. Finally, he let off the pressure.
Drenix tore the blade out of his arm, and drew his own Flame Swords. He felt the chains that wrapped his arms and torso snap to the hilts of his blades. He and Kratos circled each other warily, each waiting for the other to make a move.

BOOM!

The unexpected noise distracted Drenix for just a split second. Unfortunately, for a warrior as skilled as the Ghost of Sparta, a split second was enough. Kratos was on him like harpies on dead flesh, hacking and slashing as fast as he could.

>Drenix's protosteel armor took most of the beating, but a few hits cut deep into his organic joints. He unleashed a blast of heat from his body, hoping to burn Kratos off of him.
The heat washed over the Godslayer. Rivulets of sweat quickly drenched his overheated body, but instead of leaping away like Drenix had hoped, he simply

>"I have survived the depths of Hades, clockwork beast! Your heat cannot match the very depths of the Underworld!"
Drenix, seeing little option, started to gather within him a new power. It was a power he vowed only to use as a last resort. The area which they had claimed as their battlefield grew gradually brighter. All Kratos noticed was that the area around his target was slowly growing darker.

BOOM!

>The dark void around Drenix exploded violently. A sound like death incarnate resonated through Kratos, chilling his soul to the core and knocking him flying. When his vision cleared, He saw his opponent. He had changed.
The bright red that had once highlighted Drenix's darker red armor had darkened to rough obsidian, shot through with sickly green streaks. Where once had been his default Kanohi Huna rested the draconic Kanohi Jutlin, the Great Mask of Corruption. His blades were now a rusted, pitted silver, wreathed in black flames.

>Before Drenix could down him, Kratos managed to get his right arm up. When the newly-reborn Takra-Nui contacted his golden armlet, a godly light emanated from it, and a blast of power knocked Drenix flying.
Kratos leaped upon the Toa, stabbing his blades into Drenix's arms. He reached toward his back and grabbed the blade of the Maiden of Nature, Artemis. He raised it up, about to swing.

A droplet of water landed on Kratos's bald head. He look up, curious at this constant distraction. What he saw made his pulse quicken.

>The blade kicked back violently, sending Joseph spiralling through the ocean. The solid tungsten slug the blade fired traveled straight through the weakened glass, and continued through the floor. Immediately, the ocean rushed in, seeking to reclaim what belonged to it. Before the wave of pressure hit them, Drenix heard Kratos utter under his breath, in his native language, "Î Î;İfÎuÎÎ'İŽÎ½Î±İ,, İfİŽİfÎu." Poseidon, save me.
Then it was all black.

>The line went dead.
Kerry sighed and shut off the comm. He would contact him later, after the objective was complete.

>Theta slammed down the door to Andrew Ryan's old office. Suit sensors indicated that the largest power source was in that room.<p>

Kerry took point, walking slowly with his BR-85 raised. The weapon's burst-fire would be useful in an area where collateral damage needed to be minimal. He walked by what looked like a conspiracy board. All that had been done with it had been covered up by three words, written in bright red. "Would You Kindly?"

>Kerry moved on, entering the waiting room for Ryan's office. He gave the rotten corpse on the ground little more than a glance. Many such corpses littered the halls of Rapture. He tried the door.

Locked.
Overcharging the servos in his GEN2 armor, he punched through the door. He walked in, and checked the room.

>"Clear!" he yelled to his teammates.
They entered. Sonic looked around. "Where is this power source, anyways?"

>Kerry could also see no visual sign of a power source. He checked his energy sensors. It appeared that the energy emitted from write behind Sonic. He glanced up, and saw a slight shimmer right behind the Blue Blur.
"Sonic!" he called out.

>Sonic looked at him, puzzled. This expression gave way to extreme pain when a blade as long as Kerry was tall pierced his abdomen, splitting his torso in half. The rest of the being behind the sword winked into existence, and pushed the body of the tiny hedgehog off the blade. Sonic was dead before he hit the ground.
The being turned to face Kerry, and he was shocked to see the full detail of the being. The body of the being looked like a silver version of the old MANTIS prototype he had heard about, the one that had been destroyed by the Marine 'Ghost'. It's feet were clawed, like a dragon's, and it had wings that were made of orange energy. The normal orange strip visor had been replaced with a single blue photoreceptor.

>"Ethan..." Kerry muttered in shock, "What have you become?"
Ethan wiped the blood off his blade. The blade in question was a golden greatsword, with a glowing blue interior. Ethan laughed.

>"Much more than anything I had ever hoped to be." He turned and yelled toward the other room. "Doctor, I have kept my promise. Now, give me the codes to this damned factory!"
Out of the room swaggered Dr. Eggman, apparently happy with himself. This demeanor dissolved into sadness when he saw the dead mammal on the floor. He collapsed to his knees.

>"You...killed him..." Eggman wept.
"You asked me to rid you of the hedgehog," Ethan stated matter-of-factly, "I did. Now, Doctor, the codes."

>Eggman looked up at him. Tears streamed from his eyes.

"You...monster...I'll never give them to-!"
His voice was cut off when Ethan jammed the blade into his chest. The blade slammed into the floor, and stuck there. Ethan turned to Kerry.

>"Now, my old friend, no one has to get hurt."
"What about those two!?" Kerry spat.

>"Robotnik had his chance. Now, I'm giving you one."
"Fuck you!" Kerry snarled at him.

>"Tsk, tsk," Ethan said mockingly, "You haven't even heard my terms. You can either stay here, with me, for me to do as I please. Or, and I very much hope you choose this, you can flee, and I will find and torture every single member of your ALPHA Squad, from the men here to the people back home, including that little pink puffball, right before your eyes, before I finally rip you limb from limb. Which will it be?"
Kerry looked around at his teammates. He knew both of them would sacrifice themselves for him. and he knew he had to do the

same. He walked up to Theta.

>"My friend, as my protector, you are now being placed in the care of Joseph. Rescue him and help him fulfill my debt to Meta Knight."
Theta groaned in sorrow, and nodded.

>Kerry turned to both of his teammates. Metal was kneeling beside his former master, comforting his creator in his last moments. "You must both go. Now!"
Eggman whispered something to Metal. Metal nodded, and as he rose, pulled the bloody blade from his master's chest. He grabbed the being he had been designed to destroy, and looked to Theta. He tilted his head to the door.

>Theta turned back to Kerry, and rumbled, "We will return for you. I promise."
With that he turned to the door and lumbered out, followed closely by Metal Sonic. Kerry turned to Ethan, and stood solid. "What do you want with me, friend?"

>"Oh, it's quite simple," Ethan stated. He snapped his fingers. Behind him, an orb of black goo materialized. Its motions were somewhat organic. "You just need to stay still."
The orb shot straight toward Kerry, covering him and weighing him down. It tore into his body and soul, slipping right into his pores. The last thing he heard before his mind permanently disconnected from his body was Ethan, saying, "This whole charade could have been over much quicker. It's almost a pity you won't see the destruction of Earth."

>His mind went blank one last time, and he never woke up again.<p>

Metal charged straight toward the power plant in the middle of Hephaestus. He glanced down at the blade he carried, and plunged it deep into the core.

>Alarm klaxons went off. He heard Theta scream at him, "What did you do?!"
Metal flew toward him and grabbed the titanic golem. Using his Dark Shield, he slammed straight through the wall, into open ocean. The Shield provided a bubble of oxygen for Mia, the Little Sister, to survive on. With Theta yelling at him, Metal charged directly toward the two FOF tags he picked up were.

>He quickly spotted a bright red figure. As he slowed next to Drenix, he saw the powerful Toa was holding Joseph. Air bubbles leaked from Joseph's GEN2.
"What did you guys do?" Drenix asked.

>"I plunged the Blade of Olympus into Hephaestus's core, destroying both the factory and the Spartan Kratos's source of power. Now, we must go. Joseph will not survive much longer."
Drenix nodded, "Yeah, plus I don't think that guy will be too happy about his blade." He pointed down, where Metal saw a bright white human swimming quickly toward them.

>Metal grabbed onto Drenix with his free hand, and rocketed toward the ocean surface. They broke the surface and landed on the lighthouse island. Immediately, a rift opened in front of them. Metal herded the remaining ALPHA members into the rift.
Drenix stopped, puzzled. "What about Sonic and Kerry? Where are they?"

>"Dead," Metal said simply, "Now move!"
He shoved Drenix through the portal, and dove after him. The rift to 1972 closed permanently.

* * *

><p>I heard noises around me. People speaking. I struggled to make out what they were saying. My mind felt scrambled, but I could still remember what happened to me.
Suddenly, the world hit me with extreme clarity. I opened my eyes and bolted upright. I quickly surveyed the area.

>I was in a hospital. People surrounded me. Nurses, friends,

soldiers, and a few people who I didn't recognize. I would later come to learn that these were our new allies, driven from their homes when Ethan invaded their universes.
Two people were missing, though. I scanned the people arrayed around me. They looked somber. I came right out and asked, "Did they die heroically?"
>I saw Drenix nod. I sighed and lay my head back. My mind drifted back into oblivion.<p>

That was how I found out about the death of my commanding officer. I have since recovered. Now, I stand surveying the massive battlefield that used to be New York.

>On one side of me stands a man rippling with muscle, a bandana tied around his head and wearing a sleeveless set of body armor. His heavily scarred face looks like it would smoke a cigar, though as far as I know, he doesn't smoke. In his hands rests an assault rifle with a chainsaw bayonet.
On the other side stands a much younger man, with yellow-green hair. He wears desert clothes, mixed with ancient armor. His rifle rests on his neck, and he supports his wrists on either end. A small orange weasel stands on his shoulder, leaning on the man's head. This man has been through a lot. That much is obvious by just looking at how he holds himself.

>These men, Marcus and Jak, have become my direct subordinates. ALPHA Squad has long since scattered. I still have Theta. Mia, his charge, has grown up and become a Big Sister, a warrior that puts Theta's violence to shame. Shadow has also stayed on, wishing to take vengeance on the man who killed his friend and rival.
Get in line.

>Kirby, now Kappa Knight, leads the battle at Las Vegas. Drenix and Adam are with him. Trevor is trapped on Mobius, after Ethan locked all known portals. We have been able to open minor ones, to call for help, but none stay open for long.
Marcus grunts. "They're mobilizing."

>I look back out over the field. Ethan had been busy. Krimzon Guard soldiers made up the front lines. These men were cannon fodder. A bit farther back, Helghast special forces prepared to move, once the Guard were wiped out. Scattered amongst these troops were Cyclopes, wielding large clubs or grenade launchers, and the monstrous Brumak, who had weapons mounted on their backs.
Standing at the front of all this were two men. Ethan's lieutenants, Kratos and Colonel Radec. One was a vicious Spartan warrior, the other a cold tactician. It was rare for both to enter the field at once.

>I hear Daxter, the little weasel, state, "C'mon guys, we can take 'em!"
I hope he's right.

This is Corporal Joseph Wagers, signing off.

End
file.